

The Normal Christian Discipline of Good Works – Matt 5:16, Eph 2:10

Introduction – The great recovery for the church at the Reformation was the doctrine of “sola fide,” or “faith alone.” We are saved by faith alone and not at all by good works (Eph 2:8-9). Amen. But somehow, somewhere along the line, we sometimes are tempted to think that good works are bad things, something that we shouldn’t talk about too much lest we become legalistic. Of course, Paul negates that idea with Eph 2:10, and Jesus, along with the teaching of the whole New Testament, makes it very clear that good works are an important, expected, and normal discipline of the Christian life.

A Community of Good Works (Matt 5:16) – The church is the “good work” of Jesus Christ who laid down His life for us. We imitate Him with our good works (“y’alls” good works) revealing Who has transformed us. Done in normal life, we shine as light – the light that has been given to us. This is what we’ve been created for (Eph 2:10). We have been redeemed to be a people, “*zealous for good works*” (Titus 2:14), bearing much fruit (John 15:16).

Do All the Good You Can – John Wesley said it: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.” And this is what the Scriptures teach: We are to good “*always*” (1 Thess 5:15), abounding in “*every good work*” (2 Cor 9:8), “*always abounding in the work of the Lord*” (1 Cor 15:58). We are never to withhold good from those to whom it is due (Prov 3:27), and we have the constant debt to love one another (Rom 13:8). We are to sow bountifully (2 Cor 9:6) and be a generous people (Prov 11:24-25, 1 Tim 6:18).

Redeeming the Time (Eph 5:16) – Paul instructs us to walk carefully, with wisdom (Eph 5:15) and then describes it this way: “make the most of every opportunity!” (paraphrase, Eph 5:16). This means that there are a 1000 ways to give yourself away, to serve, to die to yourself every day.

Ephesians and the Example of What Kind of Good Works We are Talking About – As we worked our way through Ephesians, I emphasized the all-indicative chapters 1-3 (all that we are to simply believe) as opposed to the imperatives of chapters 4-6 (all that we are to “therefore” do). The second half of his letter was instruction on how to work out what God had and was working in. These good works, however, are not the kind of “radical” Christianity that is sometimes espoused as the only way to prove you are a “serious” or “radical” Christian. He didn’t command everyone to sell everything and go on the mission field, or take a vow of poverty, or deny normal familial desires.

The good works were rather normal and mundane. He wants us to put off deceitful lusts and be renewed in our minds (Eph 4:22-23), to stop lying, stop getting sinfully angry and bitter, instead to speak the truth in love with forgiveness in our hearts, ready to be tenderhearted. We are to stop gossiping and cool it with the filthy talk, instead speaking words of thanksgiving and edification. We are told to give ourselves to Spirit-filled worship and singing, to submitting to one another, wives honoring their husbands, husbands sacrificing for their wives, children obeying their parents and fathers training them up in the Lord (Eph 4-6).

Saved to Serve (Mark 1:29-31) – Here is another way to look at this. Jesus “*raised up*” Peter’s mother-in-law. What came from this “*resurrection*?” She begins to “*serve*” them. Probably, she made them dinner. She was saved to serve and her service was in the calling she already had, but now it was for the Lord and as a disciple of the Lord. This little story has profound ramifications for those who are called in this time of their lives to serving in the home, especially to mothers with lots of little ones. It also reminds us of the high calling of hospitality.

Called to Stay (1 Cor 7:20-24) – Some are called to leave their nets and follow Jesus. Some are called to extraordinary missionary work. But most are normally called to stay. Were you a ditch-digger? Remain there; it’s good work to be done as a disciple of Christ. Were you a CEO? Remain there; it’s a good work and can be done unto the Lord. If you can better your circumstance, that’s fine too.

Seek the Peace of the City (Jer 29:5-9) – This phrase is used to call people to the “radical” life of living in the city. But notice *how* those in exile were to “seek the peace.” They were to build houses, dwell in them, plant gardens, eat the fruit, take wives, have kids and help those kids find spouses so they could build houses, dwell in them... - Do you realize what the fundamental “peace-making” mission is for city life? Normal, healthy, Christian homes filled with normal, everyday good works that only Spirit-filled people can consistently do.

Quiet Lives (1 Thess 4:9-12) – Paul commends lives that are quiet, minding our own business, working with our hands, more and more. He ends with “...*always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all*” (5:15). Good works all around!

Created For Good Works – There are good works which have been prepared for us and we will be judged as to whether or not we did so (2 Cor 5:9-10). We are not saved by good works, but we are saved to good works, and our fruit will declare what kind of tree we are. It is our new, spiritual DNA and it is something that we work out as God works in (Phil 2:12-13). And y’alls good works will shine the light and bring glory to God (Matt 5:16).