13. What Are 'Good Works' in the Eyes of God?

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From the TeachingtheWord Bible Knowledgebase
Part thirteen of a series. Read part twelve.

The Biblical definition of "good works" is not merely "good deeds". Biblical "good works" encompass every aspect of our thinking and conduct before God. The Christian's good works are rooted in Christ, and have cosmic purposes that God ordained before the world began.

The Right Kind of Fruit

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

In previous articles we have seen that there are six key characteristics of a walk that is worthy of the Lord. In our last two studies we considered characteristic number one, which we find in the middle of verse ten. A walk that is worthy of the Lord means, Paul says, "fully pleasing Him." It means pursuing the goal of pleasing the Lord in everything you do, in all areas of your life.

Today, we are going to focus on the second characteristic of a walk that is worthy of being identified with the Lord Jesus Christ. Characteristic number two is this: Walking worthy of the Lord means continually bearing the right kind of fruit. We find this also in verse ten: "That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work."
A more accurate translation of this part of verse ten would be: "in every work which is good, constantly bearing fruit and increasing in bearing fruit, by means of the thorough and accurate knowledge of God."

**What Constitutes "Good Works"?**

As we focus in on the phrase, "every work which is good" - or, "every good work" - the first question that comes to mind is this: What constitutes "good works"? What is the definition of "good works"? As we look at Scripture we find that the word that is translated "good" means that which is by its nature pleasing (that is, pleasing to God), that which is upright and honorable in His sight.

So practically speaking, how do we know what constitutes "good works"? Verses nine and ten tell us that we know this by understanding God's will. And as we have already seen repeatedly, that knowledge comes by increasing our knowledge of God, by reading and studying His Word.

**Christ is the Root, Good Works are the Fruit**

Every Christian needs to remember a vital fact about good works: Christ is the root, good works are the fruit. That is the proper order. Christians are not Christians because of their good works. Christians are Christians because they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the order. Christ comes first - the preeminent Christ. He takes up residence in the heart of the believer, and good works result. We read of this in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Christians are able to be fruitful in good works, bringing forth fruit that is pleasing to God, because of our position in Christ. That is what Paul tells the Colossian believers. Look back just a few verses to Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse four. It is because of "your faith in Christ Jesus and your [resulting] love for all the saints; because of the hope which is
laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth."

**The Cosmic Purposes of Good Works**

Christ is the root, good works are the fruit. What, then, is the purpose of good works?

*Good works are believers' love-offerings to God.* Ephesians chapter five, verse two tells us that our walk in Christ, our good works in Christ, are the sweet-smelling aroma of a sacrificial love-offering to God. It is the same though that we saw last time in the beginning of Romans chapter twelve: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

*Good works are our witness to the unsaved.* The fruit of which Paul speaks here in Colossians is not the saving of souls as such, but rather it is our witness to unsaved souls, which God the Holy Spirit uses as one of the means by which He brings lost souls to faith in Christ. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles [that is, among the unsaved], that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" - that is, when God brings any of them to faith in Christ because of your witness (1 Peter 2:11-12).

*Good works are our edifying example to our fellow believers.* "In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility" (Titus 2:7).
*Good works are the means by which we minister to the needs of our fellow believers.* "And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful" (Titus 3:14).

*The Biblical definition of good works is not merely "good deeds."* The Biblical definition of "good works" encompasses far more. Biblical "good works" encompass every aspect of our thinking and conduct before God. "Good works" encompass not only caring for the poor, but behaving in a godly way toward your employer. "Good works" encompass not only giving to the work and ministry of the church, but truly loving those within it. "Good works" encompass not only distributing Bibles to those who have none, but seeking to understand, believe, and live everything that is between the covers yourself. There is a "signature conduct" that the world should see in every true Christian. The world that seeks to criticize us should have its mouth stopped because it sees this kind of new life in us.

*Good works are an integral part of God's eternal plan, and therefore they are our highest responsibility.* "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). "[Christ] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14).

This is the proper nature of good works - not to please ourselves, but to please Christ. Salvation in Christ is the root, good works are the fruit, and our good works are part of God's plan for Christians to bear witness to the lost world, and to be an example and blessing to others, especially for the edification of our fellow believers.

It is no exaggeration to say that believers' good works have cosmic purposes. They are an integral part of God's eternal plan to "bring many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10).

...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have
been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3-8)

**Next:** [Do Old Heresies About Good Works Still Plague the Church?](#)