

Good Works

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately teaches that true good works arise only from faith in Christ, are motivated by God's glory, and serve as evidence of genuine spiritual transformation.

Scripture: Titus 2:14, Hebrews 11:6, John 15:5, 1 John 3:14, Romans 6:14, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 2:8-10, Matthew 23:23

Topics: "Good Works", "Faith and Salvation", "Christian Holiness"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the true nature, origin, and purpose of good works from a biblical perspective. He clarifies that good works do not earn salvation but are the fruit of genuine faith and union with Christ. Spurgeon challenges legalism and self-righteousness, urging believers to pursue holiness motivated by the glory of God. This message encourages Christians to understand good works as evidence of grace and a vital part of the Christian life.

Transcript

"Zealous of good works."—Titus 2:14.

WE SHALL not be afraid of leading any of you into a legal spirit this morning through what we shall say, for after our frequent exhortations to avoid anything like trusting in your works, attended as they have been, we trust, by the Holy Spirit, we are not afraid that you will so misunderstand us, as to suppose that when we speak of good works, to-day, we shall in any way whatsoever wish you to imagine that they can promote your eternal salvation. We laboured when here the Sabbath morning before last, to let you know the difference between the two covenants, the covenant of grace and the covenant of works; we shall beg you to remember what we then said, and if by any slips of the tongue we should say anything that should look like legality, we beg you will put the two together, and wherein we shall err from the great truth of justification by faith, to reject our testimony.

"Zealous of good works." There are some who hear us preach high doctrine, and constantly declare that we are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, who, therefore, suppose that we cannot preach good works, and that we could not preach a good sermon of exhortation to Christians, to live in holiness. Well, we will not say that we can preach a good sermon, but we will say that we will try and preach one as to that matter that shall be as good as theirs, and as much lead the children of God to live in holiness as any of their exhortations can do, grounded as they are on trusting in the flesh, and based as they are on threatenings, regulations and promises, which they hope will induce God's

children, but which are well enough for slaves, though of little avail in operating on the true-born believer. The children of God are a holy people;—for this very purpose were they born and brought into the world, that they should be holy; for this they were redeemed with blood and made a peculiar people. God's end in election, the end of all his purposes, is not answered until they become a people “zealous of good works.”

Now, this morning, we shall first of all tell you the nature of good works, for there are many things called good works that are not so at all; secondly, we shall trace good works to their origin—find where good works come from; thirdly, we shall attempt to show you the use of good works; and we shall close up by endeavoring to prove that our doctrines, those of free, distinguishing, discriminating grace, have a tendency to make us who believe them “zealous of good works.”

I. First, then, we are about to answer the question, WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS? Now, I dare say we shall offend many here when we tell them what good works are; for in our opinion good works are the rarest things in the world, and we believe we might walk for many a mile before we should see a good work at all. We use the word good now in its proper sense. There are many works which are good enough between man and man, but we shall use the word good in a higher sense to-day as regards God. We think we shall be able to show you that there are very few good works anywhere, and that there are none out of the pale of Christ's church. We think, if we read Scripture rightly, that no work can be good unless it is commanded of God. How this cuts off a large portion of what men will do in order to win salvation! The Pharisee said he tithed mint, anise, and cummin; could he prove that God commanded him to tithe his mint, his anise, and his cummin? Perhaps not. He said he fasted so many times a week; could he prove that God told him to fast? If not, his fasting was no obedience. If I do a thing that I am not commanded to do, I do not obey in doing it. Vain, then, are all the pretences of men, that by mortifying their bodies, by denying their flesh, by doing this, that, or the other, they shall therefore win the favour of God. No work is good unless God has commanded it. A man may build a long row of almshouses, but if he build without reference to the commandment, he has performed no good work.

Again: nothing is a good work unless it is done with a good motive; and there is no motive which can be said to be good but the glory of God. He who performs good works with a view to save himself, does not do them from a good motive, because his motive is selfish. He who does them also to gain the esteem of his fellows and for the good of society, has a laudable motive, so far as man is concerned; but it is, after all, an inferior motive.—What end had we in view? If for the benefit of our fellow-creatures, then let our fellow-creatures pay us; but that has nought to do with God. Work is not good, unless a man does it with a view to God's glory, and he has been brought into subjection to God's divine will, so that in everything he has an eye to the Most High, and works in order to promote his glory and honor in the world. And even, beloved, when our works are done from the best motives, nothing is a good work unless it is done with faith; for “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Like Cain, we may build the altar, and lay the first fruits of the salt of faith, there it will lie—it will not be accepted by God, for without faith it is impossible to please him. Bring me a man who all his life long has been spending his health and strength for his fellow-creatures; fetch me some public officer, who has fully discharged his trust, who has laboured night and day, even to the wearing down of his constitution, because he believed that England expected every man to do his duty, and he wished to do it; bring me that man; let me see all his charitable works; let me witness the most lavish benevolence, the most profuse bounty; tell me that he has always, with a consistent motive, laboured for his country; and then, if he cannot answer this question. “Dost thou believe in the Son of God?” I shall be bound in all honesty to tell him that he has not done a solitary good work in all his life, so far as God is concerned.

Furthermore, when we have faith in God, and perform all our works with the best of motives, even then we have not so much as a solitary good work, until the blood of Christ is sprinkled thereon. Looking on all that we have ever done in our lives, can we find a solitary thing which we dare call good until Christ's blood is put upon it? Grant there is something good about it, for the Spirit wrought it in our souls; there is much also that is evil about it, for even our best exercises are so terribly spoiled, marred, and ruined by the sins and imperfections that are in them, that we dare not call them good, until Jesus Christ hath sprinkled them with his blood, and taken the stain away. Oh how often have I thought to myself, "Now, I have laboured to preach God's word; I have not spared, at all times, before friends or foes, and I hope I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God!" And yet, beloved, how many of those sermons have not been good works at all, because I had not an eye to my Master's honor at the time, or because there was not faith mixed with them but I preached in a desponding, low, miserable frame; or, perhaps, I had some natural aim, even in the winning of souls; for I have often feared, even when we rejoice to see souls converted, that we may have some evil motive, such as honoring ourselves, that the world may say, "See how many souls are brought to God by him!" And even when the church associates in doing holy works, have you not noticed that something selfish creeps in—a wish to exalt our own church, to glorify our own people, and to make ourselves mighty. I am sure, beloved, if you sit down and pull your good works to pieces, you will find so many bad stitches in them that they need to be all unstitched and done over again. There are so many spots and blurs about them, that you need to have them washed in the blood of Christ to make them good for anything.

And now, beloved, do you think you have any good works? "Oh!" you say "I am afraid I have not many myself-nay, I know I have not; but thanks be unto his love, he who accepted my person in Christ, accepts my works through Christ; and he who blessed me in him, that I should be a chosen vessel, has been pleased to accept that which he himself poured into the vessel, 'to the praise of the glory of his grace, where he hath made me accepted in the beloved.'"

And now, ye moralists, ye who have trusted in yourselves that ye are righteous, if what I have said be true, what has become of all your holiness? You are saying "I am a charitable man." Grant that you are! I tell you to go and appeal to your fellow-creatures, and let them pay you for your charity. You say, "Ay, but I am a consistent and moral man. I am a great credit to the country; if all men would act as I do, what a good thing for this world and generation!" Of course you have served your generation. Then send in your bill, and let your generation pay you. I tell you, you have toiled for nought; you have only sown the wind, and likely enough you will reap the whirlwind. God owes you nothing; you have not lived to his honor; you must honestly confess that you have not performed a single action with a desire to please him; you have laboured to please yourself—that has been the highest motive you have had; you felt that if you were good you would go to heaven, and that if you were evil you would be sure to go to hell. You have been thoroughly selfish, from first to last. Reckon up your accounts and settle with yourself. God owes you nothing; you have done nothing for him; and if you have, then consider within yourself, you have so much violated God's commands, and so frequently done all you could to injure your Maker, if it were possible, that all your accounts are easily struck off. And as for your good works, where are they? Where are they? Ah! it is a figment and a fiction, a laugh and a dream. Good works in sinners? There are no such things. Augustine well said, "Good works, as they are called, in sinners, are nothing but splendid sins." This is true of the best works of the best man, who is out of Christ, they are nothing but splendid sins—vanished sins. God forgive you, dear friends, for your good works! You have as great need to be forgiven for your good works as you have for your bad ones, if you are out of Christ; for I reckon they are both alike, bad, if they come to be sifted.

II. And now, secondly, WHERE DO GOOD WORKS COME FROM?

It is an old maxim, that nature can never rise above itself. Water, coming from the top of a hill, will rise as high as its source; but unless there is some extraordinary pressure put upon it, it will never rise higher. So of human nature, Scripture says it is exceedingly vile; we cannot expect good works out of an evil nature. Can a bitter well send forth sweet water? As poison groweth not on healthful trees, with healthful fruit, so cannot healthy fruit grow on poisonous trees. We must not look for good works in an evil nature any more than we should look for the grapes of Sorek on the vines of Gomorrah. We cannot expect to find good works coming from nature; truly it is vain and idle to think that good works can arise from the natural man. "Where, then," you ask, "do they come from?" We answer, good works come from a real conversion, brought about by the Spirit of God. Until our conversion, there is not the shadow of goodness about us. In the eye of the world we may be reputable and respectable, but in the eye of God we are nothing of the sort. Could we look into our hearts, as we sometimes look into other people's faces, we should see very much there which would drive out of our souls the very imagination of good works before our heart is changed. How many things there are in the world, which we have upon our tables and which we even eat, that if we were to put beneath our microscope we should be afraid to touch, for we should see all kinds of loathsome creatures creeping and crawling about in them—such things as we never conceived! and so it is with human nature. When once the human heart is put under the microscope of Scripture, and we see it with a spiritual eye, we see it to be so vile and filthy, that we are quite sure that until we have a new heart and a right spirit, it would be just as impossible to expect to find good works in an unrighteous, unconverted man, as to hope to see fire burning in the midst of the ocean. The two things would be incongruous. Our good works, if we have any, spring from a real conversion; yet more, they spring also from a constant spiritual influence exercised upon us, from the time of conversion even until the hour of death. Ah! Christian, thou wouldst have no good works if thou hadst no fresh influence day by day. Thou wouldst not find the grace given thee at the first hour sufficient to produce fruit to-day. It is not like the planting of a tree in our hearts, which naturally of itself bringeth forth fruit; but the sap cometh up from the root of Jesus Christ. We are not trees by ourselves, but we are branches fixed on the living vine. Good works, I know whence you come! Ye come floating down on the stream of grace, and if I did not have that stream of grace always flowing, I should never find good works coming from me. Good works from the creature? Impossible! Good works are the gifts of God, his choice pearls, which he sendeth down with his grace.

And again: we think that good works spring from union with Christ. We believe that the more a man knows and feels himself to be one with Jesus, the more holy will he be. The very fact that Christ and the Christian become one, makes the Christian Christ-like. Why is a Christian's character like Christ's character? Only for this reason, that is joined and united to the Lord Jesus Christ. Why doth that branch bring forth grapes? Simply because it has been engrafted into the vine, and therefore it partakes of the nature of the stem. So, Christian, the only way whereby thou canst bring forth fruit to God is by being grafted into Christ and united with him. You Christians who think you can walk in holiness without keeping up perpetual fellowship with Christ have made a great mistake. If you would be holy, you must live close to Jesus. Good works spring only thence. Hence we draw the most powerful reasons against anything like trusting in works; for as works are only the gift of God, how utterly impossible does it become for an unrighteous, unconverted, ungodly man, to produce any such good works in himself. And if they are God's gifts, how little merit can there be in them.

III. We have thus tried to trace good works to their origin and foundation. And now we come to the third point, which is, WHAT IS THE USE OF GOOD WORKS?

I am rather fond of being called an Antinomian, for this reason, that the term generally applied to those who hold truth very firmly and will not let it go. But I should not be fond of being an Antinomian. We are not against the law of God. We believe it is no longer binding on us as the covenant of salvation; but we have nothing to say against the law of God. "The law is holy; we are carnal, sold under sin." None shall charge us truthfully with being Antinomians. We do quarrel with Antinomians; but as for some poor souls, who are so inconsistent as to say the law is not binding, and yet try to keep it with all their might, we do not quarrel with them! they will never do much mischief; but we think they might learn to distinguish between the law as a covenant of life and a direction after we have obtained life.

Well, we do love good works. Do you ask, of what use are they? I reply, first: Good works are useful as evidences of grace. The Antinomian says,—But I do not require evidences; I can live without them. This is unreasonable. Do you see yonder clock? That is the evidence of the time of day. The hour would be precisely the same if we had not that evidence. Still, we find the clock of great use. So we say, good works are the best evidence of spiritual life in the soul. Is it not written, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren?" Loving the brethren is a good work. Again, "If any man abide in me, he shall bring forth fruit." Fruits of righteousness are good works, and they are evidence that we abide in Christ. If I am living in sin day by day, what right have I to conclude I am a child of God? A man comes to this chapel, and while he hears the gospel, he exclaims, "What delicious truth! what heavenly doctrine!" Yet when he leaves the place, you may see him enter one public-house for another, and get intoxicated. Has this man any right to think himself an heir of heaven? The man who comes to God's house, and drinks "wine on the lees, well refined," and then goes away and drinks the cup and enjoys the company of the ungodly, gives no evidence that he is a partaker of divine grace. He says, "I do not like good works." Of course he does not. "I know I shall not be saved by good works." Of this we are certain, for he has none to be saved by. Many are ready enough to say,

"Nothing in my hands I bring,

Simply to the cross I cling;"

who believe they are children of God, because, though they have no good works as evidence, they think they have faith. Ah, sir! you have faith, and there is another gentleman quite as respectable as you are, who has faith; I shall not tell you his name this morning, but he is better than you are, for it is said, "He believes and trembles," while you sit unmoved by the most powerful appeals. Yes you who think you are children of God while you live in sin, you are in the most dreadful error. There is no delusion, if you except the delusion of the Pharisee, which is more dreadful than the delusion of a man, who thinks that sin and grace can reign together. The Christian has sins of heart, over which he groans and laments, but as regards his outward life, he is kept, so that the evil one touches him not; the Lord keeps him under the shadow of his wing; he doth not, except in some falls, allow him to turn out of the way. Works are the evidence of our faith; by faith our souls are justified before God; by works our faith is justified before ourselves and fellow-men.

Secondly, we think good works are the witnesses or testimony to other people of the truth of what we believe. Every Christian was sent into the world to be a preacher; and just like every other creature that God has made, he will always be preaching about his Lord. Doth not the whole world preach God? Do not

the stars, while they shine, look down from heaven and say there is a God? Do not the winds chaunt God's name in their mighty howling? Do not the waves murmur it upon the shore, or thunder it in the storms? Do not the floods and the fields, the skies and the plains, the mountains and the valleys, the streamlets and the rivers, all speak for God? Assuredly they do; and a new-born creature—the man created in Christ—must preach Jesus Christ wherever he goes. This is the use of good works. He will preach, not with his mouth always, but with his life. The use of good works is, that they are a Christian's sermon. A sermon is not what a man says, but what he does. You who practice are preaching; it is not preaching and practising, but practising is preaching. The sermon that is preached by the mouth is soon forgotten, but what we preach by our lives is never forgotten. There is nothing like faithful practice and holy living, if we would preach to the world. The reason why Christianity does not advance with a mightier stride, is simply this:—that professors are in a large measure a disgrace to religion, and many of those who are joined to the church have no more godliness than those who are out of it. If I preached such a contradictory sermon on a Sunday as some of you have preached the most part of your lives, you would go out and say, "We will not go again till he can be a little more consistent with himself." There is a difference in the very tone of the voice of some people when they are in the chapel engaged in prayer, and when they are in the workshop; you would hardly think them the same persons. Out upon your inconsistency! Professors, take heed lest your inconsistencies should blot your evidence, and some of you should be found manifesting, not inconsistency, but a most fearful consistency, because living in sin and iniquity, and therefore being consistent with yourselves in hypocrisy.

IV. Thus have I told you the use of good works. Now just a moment or two to tell you that the religion which we profess in this place, and which we preach, is **CALCULATED TO PRODUCE GOOD WORKS IN THE CHILD OF GOD.**

Some say that what is called Calvinism, which is an alias for the true gospel, is calculated to lead men into sin. Now, we will refute that, just by reminding them, that the holiest people in the world have been those who professed the doctrine which we hold. If you ask who in the dark ages were the great moral lights of the world, the answer will be, such as Athanasius, Ambrose, Chrysostom; and then coming lower still, such men as Wickliffe, Jerome of Prague, and Calvin; and every one of these held the doctrines which we love to proclaim. And just let me remind you, there never were better men in the world than the Puritans, and every one of them held fast the truth we love. I happened to find in a book the other day a statement which pleased me so much, that I thought I would read it to you. The writer says, "The Puritans were the most resolved Protestants in the nation; zealous Calvinists; warm and affectionate preachers. They were the most pious and devout people in the land; men of prayer in secret and in public, as well as in their families. Their manner of devotion was fervent and solemn, depending on the assistance of the Divine Spirit. They had a profound reverence for the holy name of God, and were great enemies not only to profane swearing, but to foolish talking and jesting. They were strict observers of the Lord's day, spending the whole of it in public and private devotion and charity. It was the distinguishing mark of a Puritan, in these times, to see him going to church twice a day, with his Bible under his arm; and while others were at plays and interludes, at revels, or walking in the fields, or at the diversions of bowling, fencing, &c., on the eve of the Sabbath, these with their families were employed in reading the Scriptures, singing psalms, repeating sermons, catechising their children, and prayer. Nor was this the work only of the Lord's day, but they had their hours of family devotion in the week days; they were circumspect, as to all excess in eating and drinking, apparel, and lawful diversions; being frugal, industrious, exact in their dealings, and solicitous to give every one his own." That is a noble testimony to puritanic truth and the power of the gospel. But I have one, which I think will please you, in another part of the book. A learned Infidel says of

the modern Calvinists and Jansenists, that “When compared with their antagonists, they have excelled, in no small degree, in the most rigid and respectable virtues; that they have been an honor to their own age, and the best model for imitation to every age succeeding.” Only think of an infidel speaking like that. I think it was an infidel that said, “Go the Arminians to hear about good works; but go to the Calvinists to see them exhibited.” And even Dr. Priestly, who was a Unitarian, admits that, “They who hold the doctrines of grace, have less apparent conformity to the world, and more of a principle of real religion, than his own followers: and that they who, from a principle of religion, ascribe more to God and less to man than others, have the greatest elevation of piety.”

And just now, as the Unitarians are bringing up all their great men—so great that we never heard their names to this day—and endeavouring to do all they can in London, to bring people to Unitarianism, we would just tell them this fact. Dr. Priestly ascribes the coolness of Unitarianism to their becoming more indifferent to religious doctrine—and accounts for the fact of their chapels not being well attended, by saying that Unitarians have a very slight attachment to their religious doctrines. What a mercy! for if they continued to hold them, they would inevitably be lost. A man who denies the divinity of Christ is sure to be lost. It is idle for them to talk of their being Christians; they might as well talk of being holy angels. The best proof I can give you of the holy tendency of our doctrines is this great fact, viz.:—That in every age those who have held the doctrines of grace have exhibited in their lives a holy walk and conversation.

But once more: in just hastily running over the doctrines, we ask, what could more tend to make men holy, than the truths we preach? Do we not teach you, that God has chosen to himself a people who must be holy? Is that an unholy doctrine? Do we not tell you that God has chosen to himself a people who in this world shall show forth his praise, by holy living? Is that an unholy doctrine? And we have told you that the Holy Ghost gives a new heart, and a right spirit, and that there is something more required than you can do yourselves; that you are unable to perform such good things as God expects from you, therefore God the Spirit must renovate you. Do you call that an unholy doctrine? Is the doctrine, that men by nature are vile and need renewing grace, unholy? And the doctrine that the true saints will certainly hold on to the end: is that unholy? Methinks the contrary to these doctrines are the most unholy in the world. Is the doctrine that only those who believe have an interest in the blood of Christ an unholy thing? Is the doctrine that I preach, that Christ has redeemed only such as live in holiness, having been brought thereto by the Holy Ghost, an unholy thing? Methinks not. We challenge all those who love to speak against our doctrines to prove that there is a single one of them which has an unholy tendency. Charge us with not holding good works? Come and try to get into our church, and you will soon have a proof that you are wrong. Why, we would not have you, sir, if you would give us a thousand pounds, unless we considered you were a holy man. If you have not good works, it will be a long time before we will receive you; and if you were to steal into our church, you would be turned out in a week, if you lived in sin and unrighteousness; for it would soon be reported to the pastor and deacons, and you would see whether we did not hold the necessity of good works. If you did not exhibit them every day we would cast you out from amongst us, and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. Our church order is the best refutation of the calumny.

What more can we say, then? We hope we have proved our points to all honest and consistent men. We only send you away, ye hypocrites, with this ringing in your ears, “Except ye have the spirit of Christ, ye are none of his.” Except ye live like Christ, ye shall not be with Christ at last; if your spirit be not sanctified in this world, you will not find that God will sanctify you when you come before his throne. But you, poor sinners, who have no holiness of your own, and no good works at all; I know you have not any, because

you are not a child of God. Do you feel that you have not? Come then, and Christ will give you some: he will give you himself. If you believe on the Lord Jesus, he will wash you from all your sins, give you a new heart, and henceforth your life shall be holy, your conduct shall be consistent, he shall keep you to the end, and you shall most assuredly be saved. God bless this testimony to any such as are living in sin, that they may be reclaimed from it; for Christ's sake! Amen.

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