

Obvious Good and Bad Works

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Timothy chapter 5 as I continue through this epistle. 1st Timothy chapter 5 verses 24 to 25. 1st Timothy 5 verses 24 to 25.

Let us listen attentively to the word of God. Some men's sins are clearly evidence, preceding them to judgment. But some men follow later.

Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evidence, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden. Let us pray. And hear God as Paul ends his various exhortations and directions to the young pastor Timothy.

He speaks of, in very broad terms, Lord, this matter of obvious good works and obvious bad works, and some not so obvious that follow later. Gracious God and Savior, may, as we meditate upon and learn of this text and how it applies to our life, be encouraged thereby, in several different ways, depending on where we are in life, or perhaps convicted accordingly. We certainly want our works to shine before men and not hide our light under a bushel, God Almighty, but rather, Lord, to walk by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And to that end, may we be encouraged by this text as it reminds us that we can and do have good works, although not enough to warrant heaven, not enough to justify us, God Almighty, and yet real and therefore to be evaluated. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, may the understanding of this text be brought into our lives. We pray by your Spirit.

Amen. So Paul is finishing up specific considerations to the young pastor Timothy. The apostle already wrote about widows, church officers, discipline, and even laying on the hands or presbyteries, as I preached upon.

But then he reminds Timothy, oddly enough, it seems to us, perhaps in verse 23, to drink some wine. And there I went over last week natural law. Some commentators here in these verses read it as a general description of life that Paul is reminding the young pastor Timothy to pay attention to, with respect to the church, of course, as he's a leader in the church.

Others see it as a specific point about church leaders being brought to judgment. Given the verses prior, 17 and following, about presbyters and the like. But if it is specific, it is used in very general language.

The word elder isn't used here or anything else. That makes it, therefore, easy to apply. If it is a general description, it makes it easy to apply.

So either way, I'm going down to the details and taking it as a general description about good works in the Christian life and in the church in particular. So the first point, the obvious bad works, verse 24. I want to go over an underlining point of these verses.

Obvious Bad Works

And that underlining point is discipline is real and to be used in the church of the living God. He says here, some men's sins are clearly evident preceding them to judgment. Judgment or evaluation of a matter or an action.

It's part of everyday life. We have to make judgment calls, we say. And they are not always the end of the world judgment calls, of course.

Or decisions, perhaps. But Paul is writing of some sort of somber judgment, it seems here. Given his emphasis on sin and righteous works in these two verses.

So this judgment, what is it? Some think it's the final judgment of Jesus Christ. But even if it is that, I don't think it excludes the judgment that we are supposed to exercise here. As church officers, Paul is writing to who? The young Pastor Timothy.

Why would this be relevant if it's just about the future? It could be insofar as he's discouraged that I can't go after and stop these wicked wolves in the church. And God will get them eventually, perhaps Paul is emphasizing. That's certainly a point we can learn from this.

But either way, I think it does apply to him in the immediate, in the here and now, as for us. Because it is general language, in general terms here. Of some men's sins and some men's good works of some men are evidence.

It's a general principle for all of us. So I think it does include both and we'll talk about both. Another context of the judgment.

What kind of judgment? Well, before, in the former verses, verse 17, it talks about charges against elders. Do not receive an accusation, verse 19, against an elder except from two or three witnesses. But earlier in verse 1 we read, Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father.

That's how he begins his chapter. So you see two types of judgment there. What I call formal judgment of the church in discipline.

And then informal admonitions and the like that all of us do as we talk about the common office of the believer. So again, I'll talk about both. So I refer to both of them.

The official, of course, is exercise of church authority. Having a trial is what we typically think of. It doesn't have to mean that necessarily.

A public reprimand and the like. And there's informal, often private, but again, not always private. Non-officers can reprimand one another.

In fact, they can reprimand a pastor in this sense here. Do not rebuke an older man. He means a sharp rebuke strongly against him.

But exhort him, being nice about it, but you're still saying something negative. Maybe you should do this as a better way to accomplish this, pastor. I know you probably had a hard week or something like that.

But it can and should be done if the circumstance warrants it. Pastors are not above correction. Church officers should not be above that if it is serious enough.

Galatians 6.1 is what comes to mind when it comes to do not rebuke an older man and like and exhorting one another. Or here, the good works to judgment, some kind of judgment. You have to make a judgment call.

My friends, as anyone is detected in the transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. It's a general exhortation.

All of us are called to make judgment calls. Is this good enough? Is this bad enough? Should I say something here or there? Depending on your circumstance, depending on your relationship to the person. But it's still for all of us.

So that's the kind of judgment I think we're going to go over here, both types. Another thing to note of this text, not just the importance of discipline, but specifically here, it's a mark of a faithful church. It's a mark of a faithful church.

Jesus is the King of the church and He's given the authority and the power to discipline the members therein. This is important. For the world is watching us.

Do we take seriously the holiness of God Almighty, that He is the King of the church? Are we fast and loose as church leaders? We should not be. He has given her the authority to guard the flock, to protect the pulpit, to purify the parishioners, when sin is, of course, bad enough. Because there's going to be sins.

Love covers a multitude of sins. That's true for the church officers as well. They shouldn't be so harsh, always going after everything in the family and in the church.

When matters become serious enough, a scandal, for example, or just before it becomes a scandal, we'll talk a little bit about that as well. Do we have the discernment to see these things before they become obvious sins in this case? Unfortunately, many Christians, again, paint Christ as a pushover, frowning at churches that take the lordship of our Lord and Savior to heart and poo-poo church discipline. That assumes the churches, therefore, should what? Pay attention to sin.

Some men's sins are clearly evident. They're not going to be clearly evident if the church isn't looking for them sometimes, specifically the church officers. It's a big problem in all kinds of denominations, to be sure.

If it's not dealt with, there's no judgment, whether verbal or warning or formal. Calvin gives a good description of what this means for the pastors therein. There is nothing that distresses more the faithful ministers of the church than to see no way of correcting evils

and to be compelled to endure hypocrites of whose wickedness they are aware and to be unable to banish from the church many who are destructive plagues.

And that is exactly true. It's discouraging to pastors. I'm sure it's discouraging to parishioners as well and members of the Church of God to see such men get free reign in the body of Christ.

And I don't mean just our little denomination, the OPC or the PCA. I mean across America, even. Do our hearts go out to other churches and denominations? We see these scandals.

We see how they perhaps are too weak or let things go when they shouldn't. Now, that's describing the judgment. That's describing the framework in which I go to the text here of both formal and informal judgments of the here and now.

Of course, ultimately of the final judgment of Christ. But Paul gives this description here, it seems to me, of two time frames of sin. That is, sins are clearly evident, implied now, evident now, and preceding them to judgment.

But some of those follow what? Later in time they follow. After the judgment or later in time in life that you finally figure out, oh, this guy's pretty bad. When he says sins, of course, he doesn't just mean the sins of the individual, but the person himself that you gotta judge as well.

And so, the clearly evident sins now that the church can see that Timothy should be seeing and paying attention to during his time. Again, if the text is about church officers, which Calvin thinks and some others, but others disagree, because again, it's a very broad language. We read in the Geneva Notes, for example, because hypocrites sometimes creep into the ministry, even though there is ever so great diligence used, the apostle wishes the pastors not to be, therefore, troubled.

Young Timothy, don't be troubled. Or slack at all in the diligence of trying and examining as well. Don't give up.

You're gonna see these sins, although other sins may slip under the radar and are found later in life, later after the judgment call, as it were. Maybe later at the judgment of Christ, certainly in all cases. That's what he's probably dealing with here, although not exclusively, because there are other sins of the parishioners, like widows, for example, and rebuking the old man as fathers.

Those are sins as well for Timothy to deal with if it gets serious enough. But these kind of sins that are evident, that are clear, that are obvious, so obvious that everyone sees it. And certainly the pastor should see it, and therefore act upon it if the situation warrants it.

Black letter commandment violations are the most obvious ones. The Ten Commandments. These are the kind of violations he's thinking of.

Any of the Ten Commandments. Lying, stealing, dishonoring parents. We know what these are.

Even unbelievers know these things. And they see them. They see them in the church.

That's why they ridicule us and make fun of us at times. Look at that. You have this kind of a pastor.

You have these kind of people. What's going on in this church? Because even they see these sins because they are so obvious. And even other sins as well, not explicitly listed in the Ten Commandments.

Cheating isn't one of them. That's stealing and lying at the same time. Combinations thereof.

We've gone over that in Sunday School class as well. Qualifications for church officers. Chapter 3 in the book here.

Those are obvious things as well. Both good works and bad works. Violation of some of those things are clearly sinful.

Other violations, not so much. Because not everyone is called to be a teacher, for example. Unfortunately, people treat, when it comes to obvious sins, in the offices of the church as though the office of the church is above reproach somehow.

They can never... It's too late. I'm locked in. I'm a pastor.

I'm a ruling elder. I'm a deacon. You can never come to me from here on out, no matter what I do.

No. Timothy's told, look, they come to judgment. You're supposed to see these sins and therefore, by implication, do something about them.

Because he is a pastor. He has the authority. He has the authority to do something about it.

That's not the case at all. Pastors and churches should not be that way at all. Examination, therefore, with respect to the more narrow question of officers, is all important.

But even then, we know, we can't get it all. We should not give up hope. They will be exposed eventually at the great day of judgment.

They will be discovered, although it may take time. But those of some, that is, those of some men's sins, follow later. They'll be discovered eventually, brothers and sisters.

We can't get them all. Do not be discouraged. Just like Timothy should not be discouraged.

Everyone has this call, as I already mentioned before, a call to be observant in this matter, to see such sins and to deal with them, if it's serious enough. I mean, if he's talking about obvious sins, he means obvious public sins of some sort, or even somewhat private sins that are in the family that are serious enough to be dealt with. We are called thereby as well.

I'm reminded of the general responsibility of believers. I ran across a video this weekend, a Disney video. I don't know why there it was.

It was an old commercial. Actually, it's probably an old show, employee video, reminding the employees, pay attention to shoplifters. There they are.

And you come up to them, be really kind. If they're, you can look, you're suspicious of something, and if they are up to no good, they're going to walk away because they don't want to be involved in talking to employees because they want to steal something. In other words, they were saying, we can't stop them all.

We can't get enough police. You're also involved in this process. And that's common sense.

Pay attention to these things. And you're called as well in your general office as believer. Galatians 6, 1. Here, Ephesians 5, 1. Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him.

That is, you still do something. Just do it a little nicer. Don't be so harsh.

It's a call for all of us especially when it's an obvious sin, a clear sin that's evident to all. Now, some are unclear, but those of some men follow later, we read in verse 24b. Later after the judgment, perhaps, he means, but that's certainly the case.

That is certainly true. Nothing is hidden from our Lord. They will be exposed.

Those who pretend their entire life they can get by and be in the ministry. I had one or two of those mentioned in my book. They don't get exposed till later.

Maybe never sometimes. And Jesus Christ will know. He knows the hearts.

And He will judge them even if they got away from human judgment. Don't let that discourage you. Or after the judgment of man, we find out more evils, more things they've done in the dark, they hid from us, perhaps, because again, we can't find them all.

And we can try to stop scandals, but we can't stop all the scandals. So under this category, it's everything short of outright, clear, obvious violations. Some men's sins are clearly evident in the implication being, but these are not.

Some of them follow later after the judgment. We just haven't caught them. Maybe they gave a false repentance during their judgment, and it finally gets exposed later in life.

They're bad works. Someone under this category of not so obvious right now, someone or some institutions seem a little off sometimes. I can't quite put my finger on it.

Or they play around with the boundaries of the law of God. Or on the flip side, we don't pay attention, and we make excuses. Church officers do that as well.

There's different reasons why it's not so obvious, in other words. And that especially happens when it's families or friends or someone you like. We see this, unfortunately, with big popular pastors who fall in scandal.

Ted Haggard, that was his name, here in Colorado about 10 years ago. Huge church, gets caught with a prostitute, gets caught with drugs. Doesn't matter.

Two or three years later, he comes back, and he's a pastor again like nothing ever happened. God will judge. People look the other way under those circumstances because he was a big name.

They look good. In the case of the rest of us, smaller churches without big names, they look good when you examine a presbytery, when you examine perhaps new visitors who become members and the like because you have to ask questions of where they're from, and you find out later, unfortunately. But that's in God's hands.

And yes, some patterns in this case under the category of everything short of outright violations that's not so obvious here that become obvious later. We can do some pattern analysis, we say, that give us an indication perhaps that something is off here and we should be wary of this man in the case of a church officer. Verse 25, obvious good works.

Obvious Good Works

Some men's sins are clearly evidence. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evidence, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden. So another underlining point in the text is not just church discipline, that Christ has given them the power and the authority, here Timothy, the young pastor, to exercise that discipline, but also that good and bad Christians exist.

Pastor, we know this! What do you mean? Of course we know good and bad Christians exist. Well, I've seen, unfortunately, too many pastors, too many parachurches, too many churches, push back against good works in the Christian life. And this is what I mean.

By tending to call all good works into question. Well, we're all sinners, they may say. So why are you going after this guy? Excuse me? In evangelical circles, it tends towards antinomianism, that is, against the law.

Well, they may say, we are free in Christ from the law, and they mean well anyway, so just leave them alone. Whatever the case is, they're confused, whether intentionally or not. Sometimes it's intentional.

On this matter of good works in the Christian life, that you can talk about good works in obedience to God, but instead we hear, unfortunately, in some circles, don't judge, you're a sinner too, because even your works are not good enough. Well, we're not talking about justification here. We're not talking about your warrant for heaven.

You can never add to that. You can't obey enough. You can't be sincere enough.

That's true. But with respect to sanctification, there's degrees of it. And sanctification is not your warrant to heaven.

That's not why you're getting there. It's the fruit and evidence of being born again. Of the work of the Spirit within you.

And so, from that context, this way of talking can be misleading. But there is a time to remind people that their best works still fall short of God's glory for those who are prideful, for those who are still living in their sins. Like, again, David, the easiest example to use.

Christians can be like David, and they need that kind of reprimand. But I think for a lot of us, we need a little more encouragement that God is, indeed, working in us and working through us. That we have the gift of the Holy Spirit for those who are humble, for those who need encouragement that God is, indeed, with us.

That there are good works that have been predestined from the foundation of the world, Ephesians 2.10, that are for us. Hebrews 6.10 is one of these texts about good works. That it's okay to talk about good works and bad works amongst Christians.

And it's appropriate, especially in the church officer. That he's done some bad stuff, for example. But Ephesians 6.10 reminds us of the good things.

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister. It would be unjust and unfair if God forgot. Can you imagine that? God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love.

That's the context in which we live and breathe as Christians in our sanctification. He is now our Father and no longer our Judge. And as a Father, He loves us.

And it would be unjust if He had forgotten. That is, you know, whatever, doesn't matter. The kind of way I hear sometimes when people say, well, we're all sinners.

Your works are irrelevant. What? That's true again with respect to justification. You're a warrant to heaven.

Why can't I get to heaven? Because of Christ and His death on the cross and His life and His resurrection. Yes. But our sanctification, our call to be holy, to obey and to follow Him, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, that's real, although it may be very weak to be sure.

It still has sin. But God calls it what? Labor of love. Of your work and labor of love, which you have shown in His name to the saints.

And that's true for all of us, brothers and sisters. In Ephesians 2.10, which I had referenced before, of course, for we are His workmanship. God is molding us and formed us, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

For good works. That's what He calls them, brothers and sisters. And we should not be ashamed to rejoice in God working in us and working through one another in these things, in these good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And some of those good works which are prepared beforehand that we should and indeed do walk in them are what? Likewise evident and clear. Verse 25. We can say that.

The Bible says that. But pastor, his intentions weren't pure, okay? But they're still there. There's this weird, you know, dichotomy in our life we see in Romans 7. We feel like I'm not completely sincere and over here I am sincere.

Back and forth we go in our struggle. That's true. That's not the point here.

The point is God calls them good works. They're good works in Christ Jesus, of course. All the sins that are attached to them are covered by the blood of our Lord and Savior.

That's true. They don't add to our justification. That's true.

But they're real and they're called good works. And that should be, I hope, encouraging to us because especially these kind of good works I'm speaking of are not amazing stuff that you may run across sometimes in some circles like, well, the real good works are I'm a missionary over in Africa or something. Really? What about here at home? Taking care of your neighbor, taking care of your family.

Those are the good works that you often find in the Bible. Peter talks about that to the Christians and the disciples spread across the Mediterranean. Do a good work.

Be a good citizen. Be quiet. Work hard unto the Lord.

Take care of your family. That's what we're talking about. And you can and you have done that because we know the Spirit of God is within you and He has humbled your heart.

The clearly evident good works, evident soon and early, of course, the implication being again that it's time-based. He's making a distinction between the sins that are clear and evident now and good works that are clear and evident now and those that come later that cannot be hidden. Ultimately, here in verse 25, the good works that will come out.

It will be, of course, seen and known by God Almighty at the great day of judgment. What kind of good works? We'll run across this. It's providential.

Of course, sanctification is such a broad topic that I'm going to hit it somewhere in a sermon. It's going to fit with Sunday school class. What kind of good works? I mentioned a few of the mundane stuff, as we say, ordinary, good.

Those are good. There's not a bad thing to be ordinary. Baptism is another one.

That's one of the first steps of an adult believer of obedience to be baptized and a confession of faith for the children who grow up in the baptism of the church. And, of

course, church officers, the qualifications given to them in chapter 3 should be there for them as well. They should not be ashamed or afraid of that that we have here.

If a man desires a position of a bishop, he desires a good work. And it may seem humble to say, well, I'm not sure if I desire the position of a bishop because I've been taught humility means never saying I desire a good thing and I want to be useful in God's church or something like that. I ran across that at a presbytery exam once many years ago.

And he's like, well, I said, brother, I read 1 Timothy 3. If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. It's not a wrong or a bad thing to confess that, to confess good works. But I want to do good works.

It's not prideful. It may be, but not necessarily. Now, evidence, good works later.

Some evidence, good works later is basically what's being said here. And those that are, that is other good works that are otherwise cannot be seen, cannot be hidden, and will not stay hidden is the idea here. Over time, it will eventually be seen, perhaps by us, but certainly by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

These are obvious good works. How can that be? They can be obvious good works. They're not always obvious.

They can be private. But here, with respect to Timothy, it would seem perhaps they are obviously good works in the public domain, but people aren't seeing them. Perhaps Timothy wasn't being encouraged by his church.

Perhaps people were just, yeah, whatever, that's what I expect from a pastor. I'm not going to call it good works, or whatever the case is. People, Christians, and pastors can do good things by the power of God's Spirit within us, and people not acknowledge or even see it.

That's how. It's just the human condition. It's our own sins.

It's our own lack of attentiveness. Whatever the case is, it can happen. But, God will not forget, for God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love.

The Lord God Almighty, Timothy, will always remember what you have done, because He has, of course, worked in you, and He will always remember what you do, brothers and sisters. Working behind the scenes, quietly, other people are not applauding you and thanking you, it doesn't matter. Keep up the good works, because it is God who works in you, both the will and to do His good pleasure.

Now, what I want to point out here, He doesn't mention it in verse 25, but I think it's implied. In verse 24, we talk about sin, we read about sin, it proceeds them to judgment. There's no judgment here in verse 25.

Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident. That's it. They're just clearly evident.

The implication, I think, is they too ought to have some kind of reward. They ought to be thanked or at least acknowledged for their good works, because He points out at the end there, those that are otherwise, these other good works, cannot be hidden. That is forever, even though you can't see them right now.

So, when I mean rewarding good works, I don't mean handing them something out, a participation trophy or something. Here you go. But rather, at the very least, acknowledge their good work.

Even if you can't do it to them, you can do it to God. You can thank the Lord. Thanksgiving should be part of our prayers throughout the week.

Write the list down of things, and one of the things you can add there is the good works of others, things that they have done for me, either through preaching or through helping me with my, like my spouse or my kids, or something like that. And of course, if you're in a position of authority, you want to encourage them in this and say, thank you, please keep it up. Something like that, I think, is implied and should be done, necessarily, if we are able.

In the church officer context, church officers also need encouragement as well, from parishioners and even from fellow pastors and officers and ruling elders and deacons. And again, we're not looking for tangible rewards, necessarily. Just enough.

The individual context between fellow believers, we may encourage one another throughout the week. On Sunday, I'm thankful that you're here. I like to see your smiley face or whatever the case is.

Some of you are more outgoing that way than others, and that's fine. But all of this, although it seems more for Timothy, but certainly doesn't exclude us because it's such broad language, reminds us to be observant in these things. Now some sins are clearly evident, and that evidence, of course, can't come to pass if we're not paying attention.

As I pointed out, we can be lazy, we can make excuses for people, we can be distracted, and we're called to pay attention as best we can, and doubly so for church officers. Doubly so, because they have a high calling with an important matter before them to protect the flock of Jesus Christ. And we can observe, we can examine, and we can research matters in men and people and ministries to the nth degree, and still fall short, and still not catch something that will be captured by Christ later, after and during the judgment.

And that can be very discouraging for officers and for parishioners alike. I can't seem to get enough of a grip upon these men or ministries and figure out which ones are good and which ones are bad sometimes because they seem somewhat hidden. They're not exposed yet.

They're not quite obvious yet. They're in the gray area. But brothers and sisters, don't give up.

Keep trusting in Jesus. His judgment is sure and true because nothing is hidden from Him, our Lord and Savior. And good Christians may think their efforts are worthless.

God in Christ knows our hearts and knows your hearts. Evil men may hide their nature from us. We may not see their evil yet.

It's not clearly evident to us, but it is always evident to our Lord and Savior. He sees all, but He also protects all and guides and watches over all of you, brothers and sisters. And remember these truths.

Amen. Let us pray. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we do pray for the pastors of the church and the ministries and the sessions and the presbyteries and the like that they would be observant, they would see such things, the clear evidence of wickedness, and exercise the proper remedy.

And Lord, at the same time for the parishioners as well, to see such sins and do what they can to avoid them, in the case of churches they can avoid, perhaps. But also, Lord, with respect to good works, that we would be observant of these things in our life, but the life of others that we would encourage and identify one another as we see the day of our Lord in Christ coming and approaching upon us. We ask these things by our Lord and Savior's blood, shed abroad upon us.

Amen.