

Equipped for Every Good Work

Let us turn to our Bibles to 2nd Timothy, 2nd Timothy chapter 3, 2nd Timothy chapter 3, verse 17, 2nd Timothy chapter 3, verse 17. Let us listen attentively to the Word of God. I'll go ahead and read verse 16 for the broader context.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Let us pray. We come, Lord, to you by your spirits within us, asking and imploring you that we would indeed be equipped and equipped through this preaching, God Almighty, to understand what it means to use the Bible, that we may have a life of obedience and holiness unto you.

In that regards, Lord, may we learn anew the importance and the relative connection of good works to our salvation. We ask this, God Almighty, in the illumination therein, for your glorious namesake. Amen.

We often remember 2 Timothy 3, verse 16, especially for the explicit declaration that it is the written Bible that is from God Himself, written by holy men, moved by the Holy Spirit. It is God-breathed. It is, therefore, supernatural in nature.

And as such, it is without error, and it is, therefore, an authority in our lives, the last court of appeal for all religious matters of the soul. Being the standard of religious teaching, the Holy Writ is eminently useful for the Christian, for you, for me. It guides, it corrects, and it shows the path of righteousness, and that path of righteousness is the path of good works.

And as such, it equips us for those good works, that the man of God, in order that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work that God may call us s

Saved for Good Works

Saved for good works, so I'm going to explain the general teaching of the Bible about obedience to His Word and good works. We often hear, of course, and it's an important thing, that we are not saved by our good works.

But that we are not saved by our good works does not deny that we are saved unto good works, and good works are a part of the Christian life. The question is, what is a relationship, what is its position, what does it mean to have good works, and how does that relate to the rest of Christian life? So the first sub-point here is not saved by good works, to go over this idea again to remind us, because it is so much a part of the human condition. As we are fallen in Adam, from that point on, mankind seeks to justify himself, and to excuse his sins, and somehow overcome those sins and transgressions of thought, word, and deed.

And thus mankind has come up with all kinds of religions and ways of thinking, and philosophies even, although there is a lot more religions than there are philosophies. Because they know something is wrong, something is not right with them, in their relationship to the creator of the universe. And that means the question of good works comes up.

They know they have violated God's holy will upon their hearts. The holy law, law defines what a good work is. And so they often go towards a path of somehow redeeming themselves by obeying enough.

If I can just make up the difference. Well, I'm going over here in the chapter on the law of God and good works. In the Confession itself, paragraph 5, All this to say, of course, that by nature we have this great divide.

You may recall that before in a prior sermon. This great divide between the creator and the creature, between us and God. And the only way we can have any benefit of God's presence is that by way of Him coming to us and giving us a covenant.

Without that, we would just still have to do what we were called to do, and God is not bound to give us anything in return as such. And here is another way of saying this with respect to good works. We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin or eternal life.

Why? Because the great disproportion that is between them, the sinner, and the glory to come, heaven. The infinite distance between us and God, we can never bridge that with finite obedience. And of course, we can neither profit nor satisfy the debt of the former sins.

You cannot make up for that debt. Ever, ever, ever. There's a lot of verses that can go over here, and I don't want to spend too much time on here.

But Titus 3.5 is a good text. "...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." He has saved us by the power of grace, not by works of righteousness which we have done. It's pretty straightforward and clear.

Then we continue on here in this idea of the confession. Because they are good, that is, any of the good works that we have, they proceed from His Spirit. So we do have good works, as we'll see in a little bit.

You recognize this. Maybe not in your life. That's something we may struggle with often.

Sometimes, on the one hand, you don't see enough. On the other hand, some people see too much, as it were. They stare at their own sin too much.

But we'll often see other people's goodness. We'll say, look how good they are. They've done good things for me.

So we recognize something there, good works among us. But where does that come from? It comes from the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5.22. Galatians 5.22 and 23.

"...but the fruits of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law." These are what? Fruits are the work and the product of the Holy Spirit given to us by the Father above who works in us His good pleasure. Philippians 2.13. So that is the origin of these works in our life, which highlights all

the more that it's of grace and not of ourselves, doesn't it? And it continues here in the Confession, "...and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment." And this is the part I think we all intuitively recognize as Christians.

We see our weaknesses as believers in God's household, that we feel like we are a mixture of clay and iron, to borrow the imagery from Daniel. It's an unstable mixture, isn't it? The iron, of course, in this case, would be the works of the Holy Spirit within us. That clay would be our weakness and imperfections that cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.

So even being born again is not enough to overcome the deficiency of sin. We still need grace upon grace in our lives. This, again, is clearly set up and explained and unpacked from the Word of God in contrast to, as you know often, the Roman Catholic doctrine that you can have acts of supererogation above and beyond that can make up for the deficiency somehow.

They're like, no, even your best works are but not before God's tribunal. And one of the good texts for this is Romans 7.15. Romans 7 is a striking chapter. I find it as an encouraging chapter because it echoes my life so much.

That's the chapter where Paul is going back and forth and he writes like the poor guy's confused and doesn't know he's up from his down. Romans 7.15, Paul doesn't do what he's supposed to do and he does what he shouldn't do. He goes back and forth in this internal struggle that he describes so vividly in Romans 7. When he makes it clear by the end of that chapter, of course, that the Spirit of God is within him and he has the desire, although the wherewithal fails him at times as a believer.

Now, if we're not saved by good works and obedience to the law of God, and indeed we are not, what is the point of the law and good works? It is a common question and a fair question, to be sure, for people who don't understand these things. And so we need to explain here, and I will explain what it's about. What's this relationship? We're not saved by good works, by the instrument, by doing it, by holding enough thoughts, by helping enough grandmas across the street, or whatever the case may be in helping the poor.

But we are saved unto the goal of doing good works. And that's all the difference in the world. In the one case, the former case, people claim, look at what I have done, look at my merits of the case, and so God, bring me to heaven.

Have favor upon me for all the good things I have done. Whereas, what I'm going to describe here is because you are redeemed in Jesus, that he has called us from eternity past, Ephesians 1, he has saved us unto good works. He has redeemed us to that goal and purpose.

We're already on our way to heaven, and that path towards heaven is a path of good works. Ephesians 2.10. This is a good, one of those good texts, I think, you put in that white part of your Bible, white sheet there, your collection of verses to have immediately at hand for you. Ephesians 2.10, For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

That's it in a nutshell. That's the relationship of good works to the Christian life. Not that it justifies us, but rather it is the path and the evidence, as we'll see in a bit, of the good works and the power of the Spirit within us.

It is evidence, good works is evidence of God working in us. For we are created, or excuse me, For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, this is a beautiful metaphor, for, or that is the purpose of, good works. This is why God came to deliver us and save us from sin.

Because sin is the opposite of good works, isn't it? Which God prepared beforehand that, or in order that, we should walk therein. So these are purpose explanations. For the purpose of good works is why we are created anew in Christ Jesus.

And these good works are prepared beforehand, and part of God's eternal plans. In order that, to this end, that we should walk therein. You are his workmanship.

God in Christ as the master, former of your soul. And you are the clay. And he's chiseling you, as stone hard as it were, into the image of Christ.

Yes, you believe and you strive to follow Jesus, but that's evidence of God working in you. You do good works. You love the Lord and the church.

And you try to help one another. And that's because God, from eternity past, prepared those good works for you. And so we can praise the Lord God Almighty, not only for initiating redemption from eternity past, initiating salvation by giving us the Spirit, so that we are born again and regenerate, and exercise that regeneration of the heart and soul by faith and repentance.

These are a gift of God. They are started by the Holy Spirit unto salvation. But even the continuation therein, beyond regeneration, beyond being born again, in this life of sanctification, is itself sustained by the power of God, ordained from eternity past.

You are saved unto for the purpose of good works. Yes, your chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. That's a very broad end, as it were.

That is, it covers a lot of things. What does this look like in the particulars, in the concrete? Well, we know what it looks like. It looks like we glorify God through good works.

We glorify the Lord God. We lift him up. We magnify him through our good works.

This is one way in which he is honored in our lives. This is one purpose of good works for us, that we may manifest his love in our lives, and thus we are called to look for these good works. And that text there in Ephesians 2.10 should be encouraging for those who are struggling, and they don't seem like they have a lot of good works.

Again, the good works here is not amazing, miraculous things the apostles did in the book of Acts, but simply fulfilling your obligation as a mother, as a husband, as a child, as a student, as a worker in this world. It's as simple as that. You're going to fall short, to be sure.

We'll talk a little bit about that. But at the end of the day, they are good works, and they are good works that God has equipped you for you, you to walk therein. And it will happen.

Do not despair, because it's been foreordained. Romans 6.22 is another text. But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting.

So, to reinforce the theme again of one of the reasons why good works are part of the Christian life, because we are saved unto good works, to give evidence and show forth God working in our lives. And Romans 6.22 is another passage telling us that you have your fruits unto holiness, that we are servants of God, and part of being servants of God is to show forth fruit and work unto holiness therein, not to lazy around and say, I'm saved, isn't this great? It's just begun. Now you have to keep working and live your whole life for the glory of God and by being obedient to him.

And, of course, this is internal actions of the heart and externally through our hands and actions. But these two, Ephesians 2.10, Romans 6.22, and other passages show us the intimate connection of what it means to be a believer. And Ephesians 2.10 in particular highlights it's part of the purpose of being saved.

It's part of what it means to be a believer. It is to do good works. Good works, as I mentioned already a little bit in passing, is evidence of true faith in our lives, of the Spirit of God working within us.

We get this from James 2.18. In James 2.18, we read, because someone will say, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works. And so there were those that James was writing about and against who were playing around with the gospel and teaching therein that they have faith, I'm saved, I'm justified perhaps, and so why do I need to do any good works? I've been justified by Jesus Christ.

I believe in him, I'm going to heaven, what's the point of good works? And James highlights back and hits them hard, I will show you my faith by my works. That is, James writes about the demonstrative faith, the evidence of faith. The good works don't save us, surely, that's true, but show forth a heart changed by the power of God.

And there are other purposes for good works. I won't go into those. The Confession gives a list of them.

I only hit a few here. I want to go into some particular applications here of good works in Christian life. And first, a very particular application.

Given the situation that we are as Americans and our lives and how prosperous we are and how it's hit a number of times, in fact, this theme in the New Testament, kind of interesting, of the rich, people with money and resources. 1 Timothy 6, 17 and 19, the last chapter of 1 Timothy, 1 Timothy 6, Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but a living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let

them do good, that they may be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

So clearly here, Paul is urging them, yes, they're saved, and they're saved by grace alone and by faith alone, but that salvation is not supposed to be sterile. It's supposed to work its way unto good works, and he emphasizes here for the rich, who apparently that he was writing to under Timothy's oversight as a young pastor, that they need to do good works. They apparently weren't doing a lot or enough.

And they were really enjoying their wealth and riches, and Paul's telling them, well, no, don't be too haughty here or trust in uncertain riches, but in God who gives richly, and to use these riches, and to be rich in good works, not just rich in the things of this world and money and wealth. And thus I think it applies to many of us today, playing off the word, of course, being rich here and now, and rich in good works. The good works, of course, is what I want to emphasize here.

Instead of being like the rich fool in Christ's parable, as we heard Wednesday night, in which God told him, your soul will be called upon this evening because he wishes to double his storage house of his goods, and he rested in his wealth. Rather, he should have done good works and used all that prosperity for the good of others. Ready to give, even if he cannot give, of course.

And the rich people have more resources and time, often, compared to others. And that's why, in one sense, it's a greater obligation and responsibility upon them. Again, of course, to the situation you find yourselves in, who you can help.

Often, it's proportional to your family first, your church, and those around you, or perhaps some people in need if you have extra, extra money. Rich is wealth as a relative category, excuse me. But I also want to broaden the application beyond this particular point of, we have extra good stuff, let's use it for one another.

To all of us here, Romans 12, 4, that all of us have gifts and good things that God has given us so that we can do good works. He does not leave us unequipped. It's another way of describing this.

Romans 12, 4, For as we have many members in one body, but all members do not have the same function, having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. If prophesied, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith. He who teaches in teaching, he that rules with diligence, he that shows mercy with cheerfulness.

We may think in part of this list here, and it's tempting, that the gifts for the church that Paul goes over seems to be like gifts for the office. I mean, prophecy, who prophesies it today? Teaching, ruling, mercy, that's the deacons. What do I have? Paul's point is not to list out all the offices and all the possible gifts that God gives, but to highlight the certain ones that he felt were relevant to the church of Corinth, and to tell them, you all have some function in the body of Christ.

No matter what it is, you have something to show forth good works and to do them. You have some ability, some knowledge, some experience that the Spirit of God has granted you in your life, in your path to heaven, to use for those who need it. Open our eyes, is what we're called to do, and be willing with our hearts to do these things as needed.

So the list here is not supposed to be restrictive, but as, again, he says in verse 4, as many members in one body, but all members do not have the same function. We're all a little different, we all have different opportunities, different abilities, different strengths, and to use all of it for good works. He doesn't use the word good works, but clearly he's talking about doing good things with these things, with these gifts, with these blessings from God above, from the Holy Spirit in particular.

And thus he has a general declaration, having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. Don't bury your talent in the ground. Go back to another parable.

It's kind of funny in English, talent means the ability, and there it's money. Both. Money often gives you a lot of ability.

Use it. Use it for one another. These are gifts of the Spirit.

Not just prophecy, but even common things like ruling and teaching and mercy, and that with cheerfulness. Let us exercise and use them. All kinds of gifts.

Of course, first and foremost, spiritual of the heart, of the soul, of insight, of love, of joy, of perseverance. And these are gifts of God within us, and different amongst us in various degrees, to be sure. And then secondly, materially or outwardly, we have wealth, experience, contacts, good advice and the like that we can use for one another, and for those in need around us, as in the story of the Good Samaritan, for example.

So I'm not limiting this only to the church, and neither does God, of course. Time. Hands-on, remote.

However it's done behind the scenes, we have plenty of good works if we look around and continue to do them. And not to be dissatisfied. So another danger, I suppose, I don't think it's anybody's particular danger here, but you might run across other Christians who are not satisfied with their church or their home life, and they want to keep doing good works elsewhere.

Like, well, you got things you can do in your own church, in your own family. Why don't you, you're kind of like this goody-two-suit, busybody, in the worst sense of the term. I run across those at times.

You're like, well, you got your own family to take care of. Just don't stay home a little longer with your kids, or something like that. So it's interesting how, you know, in our weakness and temptation, we go and twist God's word and good works in different ways and disproportionate manners.

And that's a danger that can, something that we can run into sometimes, I suppose. On the other hand, another danger and discouragement is for the poor who think, I can't do enough. I don't have any money.

I don't have any resources. I can't do much. You are called to do what you can do, and that's as far as you can go.

Saved for Good Works and Equipped by the Bible

And we should be satisfied with that. Secondly, we are saved for good works, or unto good works. I have established that, I believe, in the Bible text.

I could have said more. And giving you examples and illustrations of what it looks like in the Christian life and all the particular ways in which, broadly speaking, we can do good works. But here I want to tie it to the Bible.

Saved unto, or for good works, and equipped, or as equipped, I could have used the ad a-s, as equipped by the Bible. And that brings us to verse 17. That the scripture of God, the Holy Spirit-inspired Bible, is given that man of God, Christians, may be complete, thoroughly equipped, for every good work.

God gave it to us so that we could be even more fruitful as believers. Equipped. Something in addition and on top to what we need as believers.

Not in the sense that the Bible is all I need to start a civilization, is what I mean. The Bible is not there to start a civilization. Many, plenty of civilizations started without Bibles.

They were sustained for a long time without Bibles. It was reading, writing, carpentry skills. Things like that are needful for the things of this world, the outward parts of what it means to be human.

Right? So the Bible isn't there for that. It's a reminder, again, this text is sometimes abused in our circles. It's not what it's talking about.

It's the spiritual, in particular, that it's there for. For our soul. So the Bible has a unique role, therefore, for Christians, and especially for the spiritual matters, which would include morality, of the heart, what is right and wrong.

And the way this is expressed, the relationship between the things of this world, or, as you've heard so many times, if I could find another word, I would, nature, and then supernature, supernatural, or the spiritual, or grace. The old language was this. So I have a quote here from William Ames.

I found this recently in one of his works that are hard to find. And I found this quote elsewhere from other older writers. This is early 1600s, so this is our forefathers.

It's not something new from the last 100 years. Quote, for that which, excuse me, the way they write, I've read this so many times, the way they write, okay. For that which by the law

of nature, for that which by the law of nature is profitable and necessary for the good estate of human society is not taken away, but rather is established, directed, and perfected by the institutions of the Christian religion.

For Christian religion does not destroy, but perfects nature. Grace perfects nature, is the way Bavinck said it. Bavinck didn't make it up.

200, 300 years earlier, William Ames was arguing this, and so were others arguing this on the continent. I have those quotes as well. That was their understanding of the relationship between the natural society, living, building civilizations.

You don't become a Christian, all of a sudden, we don't care about these things. I've mentioned this before. You become a Christian, it doesn't make you less of a woman.

In fact, it makes you more of a woman in one sense, because you now understand your purpose in life, which is under God and to glorify Christ forever, which the unbeliever doesn't have. They miss that ultimate goal and purpose. And so that, as it were, is the crowning accomplishment, or the crown upon the Christian life, upon the natural is the supernatural.

Grace perfects nature. And so the general revelation outside the Bible of God's existence, of holy living written on our hearts, because it is, although effaced by sin, they try to scrub it off to be sure. And so the Creator, Redeemer, gave us those two books, and the two books go together, nature and the Bible.

The Bible is what helps us understand nature to the best way possible. And so how is this done? By granting salvation, of course. We get this supernaturally from the Holy Spirit.

And through the knowledge of the Bible, as we heard this morning in Ephesians 1, 14, 13, that we were saved by the word of truth, by believing in the word of truth, which, of course, is shorthand for the Bible, and of Jesus and the Bible. And so we can see the true goal of life, to glorify God and join forever, and live life this way here and now for Him. So by granting us salvation, that makes a difference in how we live as a mother, a father, a citizen of this world.

By adding specificity, right? People know about God, but the God of Christ, and who Jesus is, is only found in the Bible. So there is, and I'm reading a book by one of the German reformers, on natural theology, or specifically the understanding of God outside the Bible. And they do a very good job, frankly, of showing how much you can know about God without the Bible.

But, of course, they suppress that truth, and they make excuses for it, but it's there. The point being in Romans 1, of course, is that it's so clear that they're morally culpable. There's no excuse for you.

And so when they go and explain all these things, they're showing all the more the reformers, look it, there is no excuse, it's all here. But it doesn't take you anywhere, it won't

take you to heaven, unless you have the Bible, which is the crown upon that natural revelation. The cap that perfects it, right? And so it adds specificity.

Who is this God? It's the God of Jesus Christ. Who is Jesus Christ? He's the second member of the Trinity. That's only found in the Bible.

Salvation, salvation history, the church, and all these things, and that leads us not only to specificity, but also the particular specificity of adding ordinances of the church itself, which is supernatural origin, of the things that are tied to the church, such as preaching and, of course, the content of the Bible, and the Lord's Supper, and baptism, and things you would not find from general revelation. You need those things. That, what, perfects what you already know and do.

You know we're supposed to gather together and follow the Lord. Unbelievers do this, it's called a false religion. The Bible comes along and says, here's a better way.

So it perfects that which they already know by nature, you should gather, you should worship God publicly, you should even pray to him. Unbelievers know they ought to pray to, they have the foxhole conversions, right? Atheists are, I'm going to pray to God. It says, no, you're falling short.

This will bring you all the way to the finish line. That's the idea of perfection, grace perfecting nature. So the two books go hand in hand, the book of salvation and the book of creation.

So we're equipped for good works by specifying what those good works look like, by making clear what is unclear in our hearts. Spiritually equipped for the Bible, of course, again, it's not an engineering manual, but a religious manual for the soul. But as an engineer, you do moral acts.

Is it a good moral act? Is it a bad moral act? What's the intent and your purpose behind you being an engineer or a carpenter or a mother? Is it to glorify God? Is it to love your neighbor? Or isn't it? That makes it a moral act. The Bible helps explain this, helps bring conviction or direction or clarity in those matters, but won't touch the question of engineering and math. That's a whole other ball of wax.

That's the general revelation. That's the things in this world. But there's an overlapping there, obviously, because wherever you are, you're a moral creature.

And where you're a moral creature, moral questions come up. When the moral questions come up, we have the word of God. And so the law therein, and the gospel in particular, law and gospel, are doubly clear in the word of God.

The gospel, of course, is the changing of our hearts, granting us the Holy Spirit to renew our wills, our minds, and our emotions, to empower us that we live as believers in a way unbelievers are not equipped, change our direction in our lives, and we gather together as believers, and it changes the direction of our family. We gather together as families, as Christians. That changes the direction of a community.

You gather a bunch of communities together, and what does that change the direction of? A society. And thus you have the basis of Christian nationalism. I mean, what do you want to call it? Basis of Christian society.

Get a bunch of Christians together, you're going to do Christian things. Ideally. And that leads us to the Ten Commandments.

So the gospel changes hearts, changes direction, gives us a zeal and desire to do good works. And the Ten Commandments specify what is written on our hearts of what those good works look like. And we even know the Ten Commandments are still what? A summary! As specific as they are, there's still a summary of so much more that we can do, so many good works that we can seek out that we are predestined unto.

And even the case laws of the Old Testament, like in the Book of Deuteronomy, have helpful hints and applications if we understand the law's purpose behind it. Although the specificity will change, like they used to use the great example of the parapet or the fence around the roof on the top of their buildings. They had flat roofs, it was hot, you wouldn't go up there, perhaps, instead of being under a hot building or whatnot, or excuse me, the cool night, they would go out there on top.

So anyways, you could fall off and break your neck. We all know this. And today we have all kinds of balconies with parapets or fences on them.

So even if we don't have the same personal reasons or technological reasons or whatever, the principle of preserving life is the point behind that. The Bible, brothers and sisters, is here to help us with these things, to help you with good works in this life as a believer. Therefore, read and study it to learn more of the source of obedience, which is the grace of God and Spirit within you.

As well as those good works and what those good works look like, both internally in our hearts and our motivation, the fruit of the Spirit, and externally in our actions. And above all, keep on praying and looking out for those opportunities to walk and the good works which God has ordained for you. Amen, let us pray.

Help us therein, God, to be encouraged, to carry on, to do what we have always, I believe most of us have already been doing in our entire life, to be a good mother, a good husband, a good son, a good citizen of this nation, a good worker, God. Of course, good, a goodness that comes ultimately from you and not from ourselves, for our flesh is but sin. We are thankful, God, that we can participate in such acts so that we can glorify you and honor your name and to show others that you are working in us.

Indeed, Spirit, be with us, we pray this week, that we would live a life unto your praise and your glorious grace we pray. Amen.