

Devoted to Good Works

- Titus 3:8, 14
- We spent most of our time last week in verses 3-7, and we were reminded of our need for salvation (we were once foolish, led astray and slaves to sin), and of the source of salvation (only God in the person of Jesus Christ can save us.) Why? Because he is the only one qualified. Remember Acts 4:12? “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” That’s why the Ethiopian Christians whose villages are being overrun by ISIS, when forced to either convert to Islam or be executed, really only have one choice. Islam cannot save us. Only Jesus can save, and He is not limited at all in His saving power by our death! Then we saw the ground of our salvation: not our own works done in righteousness; those can only come after we are saved. The ground of our salvation is the mercy of God. We were children of wrath, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, like the rest of mankind. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” (Eph. 2:4-5) Then we were reminded of the means of salvation, when God washed us and renewed us and justified us, all at the same time when the Holy Spirit was richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior. And the goal of salvation was that we would become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, adopted forever into the family of our Creator!
- We spent a few minutes on the evidence of salvation, good works. And I reminded you as I have many times before that though we are not saved by good works, we are saved to good works. That though good works are not and never can be the root of our salvation, they must be the fruit of our salvation.
- Let’s look at good works again today with these three headings: the Priority of Good Works, the Purpose of Good Works, and the Practice of Good Works.
- **The Priority of Good Works**
- Paul obviously believed that good works are important: it is a major theme in this letter to the Christians in Crete. He first mentions works in 1:16, in a negative way. He says of the false teachers who had sprung up in the churches in Crete, “They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works.” That reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 7:15-16, that false prophets come to us in sheep’s clothing, so we may be fooled by their appearance or their talk or even when they pray. BUT, He said, “You will recognize them by their fruits.” A healthy tree bears good fruit, good to eat, but a diseased tree cannot do that. That’s because our good works as Christians spring forth from our biblical worldview, as we are being transformed to think the way God does. Historian Alvin Schmidt says that “Christian’s teaching about the value of humans has positively influenced everything from the abolition of slavery, to the banning of child molestation, to freedom and dignity for women, to the formation of hospitals and schools, to the securing of liberty and justice for all, to the advancement of science, to the development of great art and architecture, to the sanctity of human life.” That’s good fruit that can only come from healthy trees.
- The second time Paul brings up works in this letter is in 2:14, telling the church that Jesus Christ came to give Himself for us to do three things: to redeem us from sin (to buy us out of slavery with the purchase price of His own blood); to purify a people for Himself; and to make us zealous for good works. Same word as used for zealots, who were crazed fanatics, hair on fire, wild-eyed, absolutely committed to one thing, to overthrow the government of Rome. But we are to be wild-eyed crazed fanatics for Jesus, committed to glorifying Him through good works. That doesn’t mean your good works have to be wild or BIG or even noticed by anyone besides the one who receives the benefit. I am sure the four guys who carried the paralytic to Jesus and then dug through a rooftop to get their friend close enough were not doing that to be seen by others. They cared about their friend and their faith was in Jesus to heal him. Same with the woman who threw the equivalent of less than one cent in the coffer in church. She had no idea that Jesus would gather the disciples around and make her an object lesson on sacrificial giving. She was just doing a good work because she loved God and knew that He loved her. We also know from Jesus’ parable of the soils that good works, or fruitfulness, is

just what Christians do. He said in Matthew 13:8 that the good soil, when it received the seed of the Word produced, 30, 60, even 100-fold. The good soil wasn't showing off. It was just being good dirt, just like you and me. Listen. The *impact* of our good works is up to the Lord. He is the one who gives the increase. We are not called to make an impact. We are called to good works.

- The third time Paul brings up works in the letter is 3:8. Right after he reminds the church of how they were saved, by the love and mercy and grace of God, he reminds them of what the result of salvation should be: good works! It's almost exactly the way he wrote about it in Ephesians 2:8-10. "For by grace you have been saved..." The priority of good works is clear, as we are called to be CAREFUL to DEVOTE ourselves to them. Very strong encouragement. Don't be careless about good works. Be intentional. Don't be apathetic to good works, or too busy for good works. Be devoted to them. Because, again, we were created in Christ Jesus FOR good works!
- The fourth time Paul brings up works in the letter is in 3:14, in his closing thoughts. We will look more at this verse under the third point, but notice that Paul connects good works with fruitfulness. We are to do good works so that we will not be unfruitful. That leads us to the second point,
- **The Purpose of Good Works**
- First, good works help people. "These things are excellent and profitable for people." That's what he says in verse 8. Profitable. It's the same word Paul used in 2 Timothy 3:16 to describe the Word, which is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." I know some of you are investors, and buy stocks or bonds or mutual funds. You are looking for the ones that are profitable. In the same way, God is calling us to invest our time and energy and lives in what HE calls profitable, and that includes good works. In the next verse, Titus 3:9, Paul juxtaposes good works with foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law, which he says are unprofitable and worthless. More about that next week, Lord willing, but I will just say this. Many Christians today would do well to tone their rhetoric way down and turn their service and good works way up. Jesus "went about doing good." He was a friend of sinners, and we should be as well.
- Second, good works glorify God. That's the highest purpose. Jesus said in John 15:8, "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples." After President Ronald Reagan survived the assassination attempt of John Hinckley in 1981, just 69 days into his presidency, he said, "I know now that whatever days are left to me belong to him." Right! Our days belong to Him because we belong to Him. John Piper says God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. If we are satisfied in God, then He is the One we most seek to please and we most seek to bring glory to. God is most glorified by the heart of a true disciple of Jesus Christ, and that is made evident by fruitfulness, by good works.
- **The Practice of Good Works**
- Let's skip ahead to verse 14 to see the final word Paul has for the Christians in Crete about good works. Paul says "let our people learn to devote themselves to good works." Again we are called to a devotion to good works, but notice it is a learned behavior. How many of you have children who as soon as they could walk, spent their days walking around the house picking up toys, cleaning up messes, doing whatever needed to be done? No, that child does not live on this planet. We always said our kids were VERY skilled at making messes and getting things out of the cabinets and drawers, but not skilled at ALL at putting them back. That was a learned behavior. And may I say that when you set your mind to teaching your children how to serve in the home, you are training them for good works in the church and in the community. But they have to learn it. The word here for learn means to endeavor, to desire, to seek, to bring into experience. It's the same word that Paul used when he wrote in 1 Timothy 5:4 "if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God." It's also the same word Paul used in Philippians 4:11 when he said, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." He had to experience want and he had to experience plenty in order to learn contentment. We have to experience ingratitude in the face of a good deed to learn that we do

not love sinners, or even fellow believers, in order that they will love us back or even say thank you. No. We serve them because it is profitable for them and because it brings glory to God.

- Finally, Paul says we are to devote ourselves to good works “so as to help cases of urgent need.” Urgent need. In Acts 28:10, Luke writes about the natives on the island of Malta where Paul’s ship had wrecked, “They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.” Not whatever they wanted. This was not a Disney Cruise. Let’s be discerning about who we help and how we help. Look down at Titus 3:13, where Paul encourages the churches of Crete to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and “see that they lack nothing.” In other words, see that they lack nothing that they need. He’s not talking about Gucci bags and Armani suits. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, “You sent help for my needs once and again.” Paul did ask for things he wanted at times, like his books and parchments. But he was grateful when his needs were met. Let me ask you something. Is the Bible sufficient to teach us as individuals, as families and as a church how to care for the poor? It is. I remind you of our study in the book of Ruth, how this widow and her widowed mother-in-law Naomi were provided for when they came back to Bethlehem from Moab. Ruth was able to glean the fields of the landowner, and one in particular, during harvest time. That’s because God had commanded Israel not to harvest to the very edges of their fields, but to leave the border for the working poor to come and glean. For the poor who could not work, the blind or the lame, alms were to be given to the priests to distribute where there were genuine needs.
- We’ve talked about the priority of good works, the purpose of good works and the practice of good works. What should we do with what we have heard and seen in the Scriptures? Walk it out! There’s no need for programming. Just for people who are devoted to good works.