

THE GOOD, THE BAD  
AND THE UGLY - Works

INTRO: This is the last message on 'The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly'. This time our subject is works. The subject of 'works' is an important subject in the Bible because according to the Bible, in every judgment people are judged according to their works. Now I want to say right off that there is no formal judgment where we are gathered to be judged as to whether we will go to heaven or not. That is a matter not determined by a formal judgment but by a personal decision with regard to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is sin that condemns us to hell. It is sin that must be dealt with in order for us to go to heaven. The Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins. To make that death count on our behalf, we must do two things. Neither of these are 'works'. First, we must realize we are sinners and we must repent of our sins before God. Luke 13:3 and 13:5 says that unless we repent, we will perish. Second, we must believe on Jesus Christ and receive Him as our personal Savior (John 3:16 and 1:12). Whether we go to heaven or to hell is determined by the decision to repent and believe the Gospel.

However, all, both saved and lost will be judged some day. We will discuss why that is so as we look at each of these three categories of works. Now, the Bible speaks of more than one judgment. In the premillennial view of the return of Christ, to which I subscribe, there are several judgments where the Lord judges man. Each of these judgments is according to man's works. So, let me read a few verses with regard to that subject:

At the rapture the saved are judged according to their works, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10). At the second coming all those still alive will be judged according to their works, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (Matthew 16:27). At the end of the millennium all the unsaved who died from creation to that time will be judged according to their works, "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things

which were written in the books, the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (Rev. 20:12-13). In 2 Corinthians 11:15 Paul speaks of demons, fallen angels, and even they will be judged according to their works. He says, "Therefore *it is* no great thing if his (the devil's) ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

So, we can gather from this that the subject of works is important in the Bible because some day every one of us will give account of our works before God.

## I. THE GOOD

Let us begin with the good works. But before we consider these good works, let me define what a 'work' is as we are talking about it in this message. Last Sunday when I talked about giving you an assignment to define what a 'word' is, one young man in our congregation thought it was very simple. He told his mom, "I know what a word is, its what I'm doing right now." So, here is another simple assignment, "Define a work." Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary has two columns on this. First, you have to determine, is it being used as a transitive verb or an intransitive verb or a noun? Under intransitive verbs he gives 12 possibilities. Under transitive verbs, he gives 10 possibilities and one of those has two other possibilities. As a noun he gives 14 possibilities. So, you can see, it really is quite simple.

We are talking about works as related to salvation. I am going to have you recite a verse for us. Who would quote for us Ephesians 2:8-9? Paul says we are not saved by 'works'. Now you tell me, is it used there as a transitive verb, an intransitive verb or a noun? It is used as a noun. So, would somebody please quote Titus 3:5, "...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us..." We are not saved by works, according to this passage. Now, is the use of this word 'works' here a transitive or intransitive verb, or is it used as a noun? It is a noun.

We are speaking of works, with relation to salvation, and our basic use of the word will be that of a noun. And now, I ask, what is a good definition of this word 'work' when used as a noun with regard to the subject of salvation? Webster's first definition, and closest to the one we want listed under the noun is, "Labor; employment; exertion of strength; particularly in man, manual labor." But Funk and Wagnall's gives a better definition, I think. I will give you # 1 and 2. "1. Continued exertion or activity, whether physical or mental, directed to some purpose or end; labor. 2. The acts, or obligations, etc., that one does or undertakes in return for something of value..."

So, let me define a work, or works as I see it as used in the Bible with regard to salvation. It is *any physical or mental act or acts done towards God Almighty in order to merit salvation or contribute towards meriting salvation from sin and thus from hell, which is sin's ultimate consequence.* It is the error of mankind to think that 'good works' done towards God will earn us something. You see, in this definition, work merits something. It earns something. When you work for somebody, and the pay is \$10.00 an hour. At the end of the hour, you have merited 10 dollars. You have earned \$10.00. You have the right to insist on receiving \$10.00. Now if there were any work we could do that merited salvation or contributed towards meriting salvation, that would truly be a good work indeed. But Ephesians 2:8-9, as quoted before, clearly tells us that we are not saved by doing good works. You see, there is nothing big enough we can do to merit or earn salvation. There is no accumulation of good deeds that would merit salvation.

So, Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that salvation is by grace. It is a gift. It cannot be earned so it is not of works. You see, anything received by grace cannot be worked for. Anything worked for and earned cannot be by grace. So Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work." Well, the Bible is very clear that salvation is by grace, not by works.

So I ask you, is there such a thing as good works in Christianity? We read Ephesians 2:8-9 earlier which said we are not saved by works but listen now to verse 10. It says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." So, there is such a thing as good works in Christianity.

So let me define for you what I believe a truly good work is: *It is any physical or mental act or acts done to bring glory to God.* So, 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

So, from all that we might ask, why are good works important in salvation? Well, first and foremost, good works done by Christians bring glory to God. That is the primary purpose of good works for Christians. But listen now to Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Not only are we to bring glory to God through good works, but we are to do good works so that others will glorify God through our good works!

Our works are incredibly important to God! And right here it is important for every believer to realize that every Christian will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged according to those works. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." When Paul says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ..." he is speaking of Christians. Every thing we have done, every work will be coming up for review at the judgment seat of Christ!

So, to conclude this point, turn to 1 Corinthians 3 (read 11-17). What I would like to point out especially is verse 14 (read). We are told here that Christians will be rewarded for their good works. Jesus instructed us as believers that we should not lay up treasures on earth, but to lay them up in

heaven. That is done by these good works, and these good works will be rewarded by God Almighty.

## II. THE BAD

So, let us consider the subject of bad works. No one will question whether there is such a thing as bad works. The origin of sin in the universe was the devil. 2 Corinthians 11:13 tells us that someday the devil and his demons will be judged according to their works. They will reap what they have sowed. But sin in mankind had its origin in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree. A full list of bad works would be very long. There are very many very evil works, or evil deeds.

I earlier defined a good work as *any physical or mental act or acts done to bring glory to God*. Now I would define a bad work as *any physical or mental act or acts done that bring shame to God*. To sin is to miss the mark. That is the primary meaning of the word sin. And the mark it misses is the perfect will and character of God. And when we do anything that misses the perfect will and character of God we have sinned.

And so, it is because of bad deeds and bad works that we are lost in the first place. Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Romans 6:23 then tells us this, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Note that incredible contrast. Sin earns wages and the wages are death and hell. But salvation is a gift! What a contrast! When one grasps this great truth, one cannot understand why the whole world does not get saved!

But sin is not always blatant and easy to recognize. There is another kind of evil worker. We find this in 2 Corinthians 11 (read 13-15). Here we are told that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light! And then it tells us that if Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, it is no great thing if his ministers transform themselves into an angel of light as well. Now I ask you, when these ministers of Satan are transformed into angels of light, what do they look like? Do you think they look like winged bats

with a pitchfork and a tail? No! They look like light! They look good. They sound good. They seem good. I am not talking about Catholics or Cults, but those professing to be Evangelical Christians.

I want to name some for you: Rob Bell, Joel Austine, Eugene Peterson, Rick Warren etc... Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, is so full of light the hiss of the serpent is unnoticeable to the untrained eye. These are, I believe, ministers of Satan transformed into an angel of light. I want to give you one example. On pages 57-59 Warren talks about the fork in the road and titles the section with these words, "What Will You Live for?" Then he says there are two things you must do to be saved and they are receive and believe. And on page 58 he says, "...I invite you to bow your head and quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: 'Jesus, I believe in you and I receive you' (pronouns to deity left uncapitalized by Warren). And then he says, "If you sincerely meant that prayer, congratulations! Welcome to the family of God!"

Now there is so much right in those pages and the light is so bright, that multiplied thousands fail to see the error. But the error in those pages is absolutely fatal. It will end you in hell forever. Now I ask you, please tell me, what was missing? Repentance, of course! The very reason we need to get saved, sin and repentance from sin is bypassed entirely. It is not even mentioned! Yet when I read the whole section, it sounds like an angel of light. But the message is fatal. Those who do as instructed are lost, not saved!

I know many will differ with me, but I believe that 2 Corinthians 11 has these kinds of people in mind. Verse 13 says they are deceitful workers! Their works look good but their works are deceiving! Verse 15 says their end will be according to their works! And some might say, "But they do many wonderful works!" Jesus said, "Many will come to Me in that day and say, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then Jesus said this, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" These

people pointed at their wonderful works. Jesus said they were those who practiced lawlessness!

I had more I wanted to say here, but I must move on for the sake of time. Let me mention one matter with regard to bad works and sin. Many say to me, sin is sin. There is no size difference. I agree sin is sin. I do not agree there is no size difference. If you wish to study that yourself, read Luke 12.

So, let me conclude regarding bad works. The sum of bad works is this: if we have committed one bad deed, we are lost. We are going to hell. That old time message is as true today as it was when our forefathers preached it. And with this very, very bad news, there is some very, very good news. There is cleansing from sin. Sin can be forgiven and washed away. The good news is that there are two things we must do, and neither of these is a meritorious work. Both are a means of grace. First and foremost, to be forgiven the sinner must repent. Repentance is a change of mind. It says, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner! I have sinned against You! I have shamed Your holy name! I deserve death and hell! Oh, God, I am devastated by the knowledge of what I have done to You!" And then second, you must understand that to pay for your sins, God gave His only Son Jesus Christ to die in your place and to taste your punishment. And He did this, and was buried and raised again by God Almighty. And in order to be saved, you must believe those facts of history. And the moment you have repented and believed you will be saved.

### III. THE UGLY - Hebrews 6:1-2

Well, that brings us to consider one other class of works, works I would call the 'ugly'. I want you to turn to Hebrews 6 to see this kind of works (read 6:1). The Scripture speaks of this third kind of works and it calls them dead works. We find these mentioned again in Hebrews 9 so let us read this passage also (read verse 14). Now here we note something about dead works. They are something we need to be cleansed from.

Now, there is some question as to what is meant by dead works and there seems to be no prevailing

opinion on the subject. I want to give you my opinion of what these dead works are. You see, the book of Hebrews is written to Hebrews, Jewish people. They have been converted and have become Christians. And now they have become discouraged in Christianity and they are thinking, it seems, of going back to Judaism, the very place from which they have come. Might I warn any here that may be drifting. Maybe once you were excited and on fire for God, but now the fire is dying down. You are not reading the Bible or praying as you once did. Here is a warning. Do not drift back.

And their problem that the writer picks up on is that these people had failed to continue to grow spiritually as any Christian should (read 5:12). So the writer says in 6:1, "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works..." Now he does not say 'evil works' but dead works. These do not appear to be bad works, but they are dead works. They are, it seems, useless works.

I am inclined to believe that these 'dead' works, refer to all those works they did in order to obtain salvation when they were still in Judaism. They were taught that to be accepted by God you had to do a whole list of good works. By doing these good works, they would eventually be saved. Notice for instance that the passage refers to 'baptisms' plural; not baptism, singular. This may refer to their many ceremonial washings. They have been saved, and baptized in a Christian baptism, and now they are looking backward with longing eyes. But the writer encourages them to move past all those elementary things they had learned already, and move on to perfection.

So, I think the phrase 'repentance from dead works' refers to their having come to true salvation, and having repented from those dead works. Let me explain this kind of religious life from the way it works many times in churches today. When a church becomes traditional, as Judaism had become in the time of Christ, salvation becomes a works thing as well. So, in traditional churches today, many people think that



if they get baptized and join a church, they are now on the way to heaven. And if they will do enough good things, such as read the Bible or pray or give to the needy, that in some way, when they die, they will go to heaven. But this is a works salvation. It is getting saved by doing. But when salvation has any other starting point than the new birth by the Spirit of God, it is a works salvation!

Now, is it an evil work to get baptized? Is it an evil work to join a church? Is it an evil work to read the Bible or to pray or give to the poor? No! But it is a dead work. Any work that is done as a work towards salvation, is a dead work. So, what do we do with such dead works? We are to repent from them. That means we change our mind about them. We now say, "My baptism did not contribute towards salvation. My joining a church did not contribute towards salvation." That is repentance from dead works. According to Hebrews 9:14, dead works are something we need to be cleansed from.

Now let me show you what kind of life dead works wants to produce. Matthew 6:2, "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." Matthew 6:5, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. Matthew 6:16, "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." Who could deny that it is not good to pray wherever you are? But these works, because they come from the wrong motivation, are dead.

Listen to another one, "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of

all that I possess'" (Luke 18:10-12). Who can deny that he did not do good things? But the Scripture says he left his prayer time unjustified by God. Why? That whole list of works which he thought were so good, were actually dead. They had no value to God. He went home unjustified.

Listen to one more, this one comes to us from judgment day, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

What we shall we finally say about dead works? As good as they may seem to be, they contribute nothing towards salvation, and once recognized, they need to be repented of.

CONCL: And so we conclude our brief subject of works. Let me begin with the good. Let me say this most clearly: good works do not bring salvation, but true salvation will bring about good works. It is the saved who are to do good works. It is these good works of the Christian that count in the kingdom of God. And as saved people, we need to recognize that at the judgment seat of Christ, we will give account of every word and every work. And we need to remember that God will reward good works. And let us remember Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." And again, "Let us not grow weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

With regard to bad works, let me say what the Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." One bad work will condemn us to hell. I wish I could bring the realities of judgment day before us. Oh, what an incredible day this will be for the lost. I have heard and read of some horrible agonies people have experienced, but I am certain no agony has ever yet described the agony the lost will experience at judgment day. And from there on, throughout all eternity, that agony will continue. If you

are not saved, this very day you need to realize that the moment you die, you will go to that awful place called hell. Denying that hell exists will not change the facts. It is high time to be saved. The two things I find in Scripture required for salvation are repentance from sin and faith in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And last, with regard to the ugly works, if you are even a member of this church and you think that because you are a member or because you are baptized you will be saved some day, then today is the time to acknowledge you are lost and you need to be saved. But maybe you are not part of this church and you wish you might be so you could be saved, I want to remind you that baptism and even church membership in this church will not get you one inch closer to heaven. As a matter of fact, it would make you two-fold more the child of hell. You need to get saved first, and that by grace through faith.