

Good Works (2)

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We ended the last article hoping to look at several areas related to how we perform good works. We saw in the last article how the standard for good works is spiritual and that God judges our deepest motives and thoughts. Now, we will move on and take note of how all of the activities of both our mind and body have a spiritual character to them.

As children of God, we tend to separate our lives into two categories. There are the activities of everyday life such as going to school, going to work, spending time with friends, reading, and such things. And then there are spiritual activities which we perform such as personal devotions, going to catechism, going to church on Sunday, and studying the Bible. While there are times when we are and should be more spiritual, we ought to remember that even in our everyday activities we are laboring spiritually. Even though going to school and doing our homework may seem like very unspiritual activities, they are not, if we consider our thoughts, motives, and desires as we go about these duties.

This is a frightening reality to consider. There are many texts from the Scriptures that could be used to prove this point, but one will suffice. [Ephesians 6:5-8](#) reads,

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

Notice from this text the spiritual nature of the employee's obedience and service to his employer. The servant's obedience proceeds from the heart and is centrally unto Christ. The employee's service is to the Lord and is called "doing the will of God." This reality is true in all spheres of our lives, whether we are students obeying our teachers, citizens submitting to the authority of the state, or teenagers honoring our parents. Our deepest desire in all of our thoughts, words, and deeds must be to do the will of our Father in whatever station and calling He has placed us. God is not pleased with the teenager who outwardly obeys his parents, but whose inward thoughts are of rebellion and disobedience. Outward obedience to God's will is no obedience at all. God requires that our desires and motives be according to His will.

The spiritual nature of all of our labors is made known to us when we pray the Lord's Prayer. Specifically, when we pray the second and third petitions, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are praying to God for grace to walk in good works. How is this? As the Heidelberg Catechism explains these petitions, when we pray "Thy kingdom come," we are asking God to "rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee" (Q & A 123). When we pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are asking God to "grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good; that so every one may attend to, and perform the duties of his station and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven" (Q & A 124).

In order for us to walk in good works, we must be doing the will of our Father and not our own will. Jesus, the Son of God, said in [John 6:38](#), "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." And we must do the will of our Father from the

heart, by faith, and to His glory. We know that we are performing good works to God when we experience within ourselves a battle. Within us, there is the old man of sin which seeks to fulfill the evil desires of our flesh. He is self-seeking and in complete opposition to the will of God. But, there is also the inward (new) man, who delights in the law of God and desires to do God's will. We find this battle to be intense, especially when the world places before us the "easy way" of self-fulfillment and self-promotion. This battle becomes more intense as we grow older and as we more walk in good works and are faithful in the stations and callings God has placed us in.

How are we to know God's will for us? Briefly, we know God's will for us as He has revealed it to us in His Word. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path," we read in [Psalm 119:105](#). We also come to know God's will for us as He providentially rules the circumstances of our lives. God providentially caused David to care for his father's sheep so that he might be prepared to be king of Israel. Likewise, God sovereignly rules our lives so that we are led to know His will as to our stations and callings by the preparations He gives us and the circumstances He leads us through. Always we are to examine, by His Word and prayer, whether we are really performing the work which God has called us to perform.

Quite often, we are tempted to set up our own standard of good works apart from God's will. This is what the Catechism refers to when it speaks of works "founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men" (Q & A 91). When we are not living by faith, and therefore not content with God's will, we vainly imagine that God will be pleased with our works which are not performed according to His Word. Or, we think that if we are doing what worldly men declare to be good that God will be pleased with us. One example of this will help us better understand.

God's will for the younger women of the church is recorded in [I Timothy 5:14](#) where we read, "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." What the world declares to be good is nearly the opposite. The world says to young women, "live it up as long as you can before you marry, and when you marry, have only two children (and wait to have them) so that your career can flourish and so that you do not have to be tied down at home." According to the old man of sin it is very tempting for the young married women (and more importantly their husbands) of the church to live according to what the world calls good in this area. Further, it is very tempting to imagine that God is somehow pleased with this worldly philosophy. Yet, God calls each of us to renounce our own wills and to do that which He calls good. If we are young men, God calls us to be "sober minded" and to show ourselves "a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned" ([Titus 2:6-8](#)). If we are young people, we are called to obey our parents in all things, "for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" ([Col. 3:20](#)). If we are employees we are called to obey our employers in all things, and to perform our work "heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" ([Col. 3:22, 23](#)). No matter who we are and no matter where God has placed us in this life, we find that His Word throughly furnishes us unto all good works ([II Tim. 3:17](#)).

Another error that prevails with regards to good works is that one has to be performing some grand and glorious work before men in order to be really performing good works. There are those in the world who spend all of their lives perfecting and practicing completely vain activities (such as sports) in order that they might have the praise of men and be considered to be doing good. There are those in false and apostatizing churches who, for example, cook up grand mission or witnessing schemes and who direct all kinds of attention to themselves in order to prove that they are performing some great work with which God will be pleased, all the while

ignoring the responsibilities which God has called them to perform. We must not fall into this error. We are walking in good works when we are doing, from the heart, what God has truly called us to be doing. When we consider the work of the godly mother in the home we are struck by the reality of this truth. By all the standards of the world and of men, her work is at best a drudgery and her time would be better spent doing almost anything else more satisfying or fulfilling. Yet, if we look at the spiritual aspect of the godly mother's labor in the home, there is no more glorious work. Yes, it is very difficult, with long hours, little sleep, with no medals or awards, and no cheering crowds, yet God is pleased with the mother who renounces her own will and who labors willingly and faithfully in the place God has put her. This is just one example of how one truly walks in good works. The young people of the church do good to consider the work of their own mothers and of the other godly mothers in the church as an example of good works. May God give us grace to renounce our own wills and to seek to do His will. May we not seek the praise of men, but may our desire be to please our heavenly Father in the place He has given us in His kingdom.

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