

(Titus - Part 25): The Christian and Good Works I

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of maintaining good works as a reflection of genuine faith in God, rooted in Paul's teachings.

Duration: 38:32

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 18:1, John 14:2, Acts 20:24, 1 Timothy 1:15, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Titus 3:8

Topics: "Titus"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of a faithful saying, which is a phrase often used by Paul in his writings. There is some debate among commentators about whether Paul meant the preceding or following statements to be the faithful saying. The preacher emphasizes the importance of believers being diligent in maintaining good works and being actively involved in serving God, even if they may not have certain talents like singing. He shares a testimony of a photographer who was converted by listening to a tape recording of one of his sermons.

Transcript

Now this, as you understand, represents stages in the journey. This is about 20-some sermons I've preached on it, and I've arrived at verse, we've arrived at verse 8, chapter 3. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

Now this little phrase, this is a faithful saying, it's really a sentence, is characteristic of Paul, in fact, peculiar to Paul. And commentators don't quite agree, they don't disagree, they just don't quite agree, about whether Paul meant, this the foregoing is a faithful saying, that after the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, and so on, or whether Paul meant the following is a faithful saying. You can't judge by the way it's versified, for the versification was not the original.

Knox translates it, it is well said and I would have you dwell on it, that those who have learned to trust in God, so on. So I think and believe that Paul meant the following is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou constantly affirm, namely, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. Now this phrase is used by Paul in the Bible, and by nobody else but Paul.

The nearest to it comes in that passage, in two passages in Revelation, these are the true sayings of God, and these words are true and faithful. But no place else does anybody say this is a faithful saying, that was Paul's phrase. Now he said in 1 Timothy 1.15, this is a faithful saying that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which I am chief.

He said in 1 Timothy 4.9, bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable for all things. And he says in 2 Timothy 2.11, is it? 2 Timothy 2.11, if I have it right, I will not bother to look for it. But yes, he says, it is a faithful saying, for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he will also deny us. Then he uses it again in the text of the morning.

Now I think this needs to be explained a little bit, not that any great world-shaking matter hangs upon it, but it's good to know what a man means and why he said it, even if it is not the most important thing that he ever said. The using of the phrase, this is a faithful saying, doesn't make the Bible any less true or any more true. But we are interested in this man, Paul, we owe more to him than to anybody else except Jesus Christ, perhaps David.

So we'd like to know why he said this. Now I give you my explanation. I think that the fact that it's stated in simple, non-scholarly language doesn't make it any less true.

And if I were to encumber it with learned jargon, it wouldn't make it any more true. So here's the explanation. That in the early Church, before the epistles were written, there were many sayings that came from Jesus our Lord and from his apostles that had not gotten written yet.

And they were sung as snatches of hymns. They were repeated often among the people, such as some of our phrases, Jesus never fails and God answers prayer and so on, or trust and obey, phrases that are not biblical but that sum up biblical truth simply. And you hear it often.

You many times hear a preacher say, we sing, and then you'll quote part of a hymn and say, this is true. Well, now that's what Paul meant here. The people of Paul's time had a little saying among themselves that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

And he said, now that's true. That's a faithful saying. He said, you'll hear it and it's so.

Then bodily exercise profits little, but godliness is profitable under all things. He said, now that's true. You hear this said and that's faithfully said.

And then this about Christians, all Christians ought to maintain good works. I said, you hear that said often. The preachers say it often and it's come down to us from our Lord.

Now he said, that's a faithful saying. That's the explanation. And that's why he used it.

Now he said, I want you to affirm this constantly, keep saying this, dwell on it. Said the translation read before, dwell on this. They had been saying it, but he said, now I want you to know that it's true and therefore keep saying it.

This is more than a good thing. It's so true that it's divinely true. And it must be repeated.

You must keep bearing down on this and I will let you affirm it constantly. See, preachers are supposed to have nothing much to do but sit around and then appear in the pulpit on Sunday. But the simple fact is to keep a balance between unnecessary repetition and sufficient repetition to make a thing work, takes a lot of prayer and a lot of hard thought.

Some brethren just repeat continually, till I don't know where I could go to sleep better than sitting third row back in their church. Because they won't say a thing that I haven't already heard. And they won't even say it in a different way.

But there is another matter and that is that if you don't keep hammering on it, people will forget it. If you don't keep saying it, it won't have any dynamism in it. So he said, I want you to affirm constantly.

So if you want to pray for your preacher, you pray that he'll know how to say it often enough and emphatically enough to detonate it and set it off and cause a moral explosion. And yet not say it so dully that people will go to sleep under it. Keep that in mind, young preacher there.

That's a job we have to do. Now, what is this saying that he said, you often hear it, he said, you often hear it said among the brethren. And I want to assert it that it's true.

And I want you to keep saying it because it's of God. It's this, that they which have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. They which have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.

And I want you to hear this little phrase. They which have believed in God. What did he mean by this anyway? They which have believed in God.

You have to admit it's not very plain because the Parsees believe in God and the Hindus believe in God. And I can say to him by saying simply that every religion known to man except perhaps Buddhism, and there's an argument over that, and Confucianism. And Confucianism is not religion but a philosophy.

And so therefore, every religion known to man believes in God. And every praying person believes in God. And everybody believes in God.

So he says, they which believe in God should maintain good works. Now that's making it pretty broad. But do you know, my brethren, that we can know what is meant by knowing who said it? Oftentimes a man will say a thing, he'll write a thing, and it'll be ambiguous, which means it can be taken two or three ways.

Two ways usually, but often more than two ways. And he doesn't make it clear. But you can know what he meant by knowing who he is.

By knowing his testimony. By knowing what his past life has been. Somebody will pick up a copy of the magazine I edit, will read it in the dentist's office.

This one woman wrote me that she did, read it, I've forgotten where, but with some office. Picked it up and read it. And she wrote me a long but friendly scolding letter about, because I thought the world wasn't getting better.

Well, she said, didn't make it clear. Well, the reason she didn't get it was that she hadn't known the background. If she had known the background, if she had known that I was of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, if she had been around this church a little, she'd have been able to read between the

lines and make out what I was saying without my having to spell it out with woodblocks.

Now, it is the same with anybody that's known across the street. If he speaks ambiguously, don't write him a letter and scold him. Know what he means by what he believes.

The man Paul, we know what he believed. Believed in God, he said. What did that mean to a Jew who had become a Christian? What did that mean to a man who was a believer in the Messiah? You know what it meant.

Now, there are men in this city, and I'm not going to dignify them by mentioning their names or degrade myself, but there are men in this city who are so liberal and modernistic in their views that when they say, believe in God, you don't know what they mean because they are misinterfacing both ways, and they balance themselves on the tightrope carefully and are careful to please everybody, and the result is when they say, they that believe in God, you have no remote idea to whom they refer because they have no sure conviction themselves. So they use the phrase loosely and carelessly, but never did Paul. Paul said, they that believe in God ought to maintain good work.

He was writing to a church, and he was an apostle. Who was this man, Paul? Oh, my brother, he was one who had gone all over Asia Minor preaching one thing. God is, and Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

God the Father is, and Jesus Christ is his Son. He'd been in jail and out of jail. He'd been stoned and cuffed and kicked and starved and cramped on and shoved around and lied about and maligned and columniated, and he had got all that because he loved God and Jesus Christ, his Holy Son, and everywhere he went he went quoting the Old Testament scriptures, Jehovah great I am by heaven and earth confessed, and so he didn't have to write a whole page to make them know.

They knew what he meant because they knew who said it. So my friend, it's possible for you to live a life that you can keep pretty tight mouthed and still have a mighty good testimony. Everything you say, they won't misinterpret you.

They will for a little while, but as soon as they get to know you, they won't misinterpret you. If you only half say it, they'll know what you mean. Tom Harrod could come here and talk a half an hour and never mention Jesus and go away.

I wouldn't worry about it. I would if some man did it, because I'd know that the context, as they say, would indicate they didn't want to mention him. But Tom Harrod lives and he hurts so much all the time, he takes Jesus Christ for granted, and so did Paul.

And so when Paul said there to believe in God, everybody knew what he meant. He meant trust in Jesus Christ, who is the way unto God, and who is God made manifest to dwell among a mystery of Godly men. Now, Paul used this same thing before.

Paul would have been flunked out of Wheaton or out of Nyack from the Moody Bible Institute for this one. Paul said, For I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. Now, he said that.

That's there in print, in English, and it's a good, fair, close representation of what he wrote in the Greek. Now, he'd have been flunked out. They'd have written in red pencil across the top, unclear.

Your pronouns have no antecedent. And they'd have marked him down to 55 on that paper and sent it back. But the old man of God, that was the last book he ever wrote, that 2 Timothy.

So he said, I know whom I have believed, and he didn't say whom the whom was. He didn't put any name there, you see. I know whom.

And some Jew could have said, I know what he means. He means Jehovah. And a Parsi could have said he means Zoroaster.

And somebody else could have put his God in there. But they'd have arrested Paul's language to their own destruction because Paul never meant anybody but Jesus Christ, his Lord. He was the one who went around turning the world upside down by what he had to say about Jesus Christ.

He was the one who said that I count my life but nothing that I may win Christ and be found in him. So when he said, I know whom I have believed, he didn't need to put the antecedent to the pronoun in. Pronoun was Jesus.

It's possible to live so that when you use pronouns and say he, people know who you mean. You don't have to explain it. It takes a little living to get there.

But after a while you can get there. And Paul was there, brother. He was there.

It takes a little living to get to a point where just raise your hand and folks know what you mean. Ah, God has these people. He has them.

I saw some of them out and some would go. First, first meeting I was, I was there. I got there Tuesday and they introduced me, or just before they introduced me, they said, brother, Olin Jones will lead us in prayer.

Well, I didn't know Olin Jones, but the man, young fellow about my age, got up and led in prayer. And, oh brother, what a prayer. And I said to the district superintendent afterwards, I said, is that man as good as he sounds? He said, oh, he is.

He said, he just walks with God. What a prayer. Was worth my going over there to hear that man pray.

What a prayer. Well, so childlike, so reverent, so deeply sincere, so radiant. He just talked to God as if he had, he just was addressing him face to face.

And then he quietly sat down. Well, that, that set the meeting up for me. I didn't have to have anybody sing a girl's trio after that.

I was already set up for the sermon, just to hear that man pray. Now, that man, after that, could say anything he wanted to say, and I knew what he meant, because I knew who he was. So Paul said, I know whom I have believed, and of course the whom is nobody else but Jesus.

And I know that he's able to keep that which I have committed unto him. Now, what's that? No antecedent there. That relative pronoun, it's got to have something back of it, but it doesn't have anything back of it.

Paul? What's the matter? Well, Paul said, I'm so wrapped up in God, I forgot to be grammatical. So he'll keep that which I have committed unto him. What's that which he's committed? Oh, my brother, I just wish we could just read all of Paul's epistles and his sermons in the book of Acts and see everything Paul has.

Hope for the future, his glory, his crown, his heaven, his father's house, everything that Paul had lived for and was soon to die for. That's what Paul had in mind. He didn't have to make a grocery list here or a bill of lading to tell us what he meant.

He said, that which I have committed, knowing Paul, we know what he meant. And I repeat that you'd better get fast to a place where you can keep still and still give your testimony. You better get there quick to a place where you don't have to spell it all out.

People know what you mean. They know what you mean. We got people in this church that could get up and pray and never mention Christ's name and sit down, and I knew what they meant, and God knew what they meant.

The theologian or the Bible student, particularly the freshman, would condemn them out of hand. But God knew what they meant, just as he knew what Paul meant here, and he knew who Paul meant. Then he said, he'd keep that which I've committed unto him against that day, and he didn't say what day.

What day? If somebody's birthday, Christmas, Easter, what day? Paul didn't say what day. So you see, Paul made three errors there. School miles would have turned him down.

But Paul's life was his grammar, and Paul's known message, what he stood for, what he lived in, what he was soon to die for, said what he didn't say and couldn't say in print. What day is it? Ah, it's the day of his appearance. It's the day of his appearance.

It's the day when he shall walk out and walk down the sky and shout with a loud voice that's heard round the world and wake from the dead every sleeping saint and glorify every living one. That day. Paul looked forward to that day.

We're so learned in some evangelical circles now that we are ashamed to admit we believe in that day, but I still believe in that day. I haven't got it all straightened out, though I used to have. But I believe in that day.

I believe in the coming of the day. And that's the only day the Christian lives for anyhow. He lives for that day.

Paul said that day, and he didn't have to, he didn't have to explain it. Everybody that listened to Paul knew. They knew that he had written, he had preached, he had prayed, he had exhorted, he had labored with that day in view.

So he didn't need to say what day. Now, he said they that believe in God should be careful to maintain good works. Now there's confusion, and this will be repetitious because it's occurred before.

But let's hope instead of it being repetitious, it'll turn out to be just underscoring for emphasis. The confusion about good works in the Church. Incidentally, I got another letter last week.

Some weeks go by and I get nice letters, and others they go by and I don't. This last week wasn't my week. I should have stood in bed.

But a second lady wrote me, and she also scolded me for about three solid, finely written pages. Because of what I had said, that not all faith pleased God. Well, poor lady, she's in, of course, confused because her teachers have taught her wrong.

Some have taught error about this, that good works are meritorious. Jesus said, after you've done all you can do, and have done the best you can do, say, I'm an unprofitable servant. That's what Jesus taught about good works.

And Paul went to great pains to teach that you couldn't be saved by good works. But some people have taught that you could. They have taught that salvation is achieved by good works, and that grace is a supplement to good works.

That there's a place for grace, but that grace merely comes in and pays out what you can't pay. You pay seventy-five percent of your way to heaven by doing good, and grace comes in and graciously helps you with the other twenty-five percent. Now, that is taught in some circles.

Not, of course, in that rather ridiculous way, but they teach it. Now, this, of course, isn't violent contradiction to the teaching of the New Testament. The hymn says, Could my tears forever flow? Could my zeal no respite know? These, for sin, could not atone.

Thou must save, and thou alone, and that is a faithful saying, and worthy of much repetition. But others have gone in the opposite error. Always remember that the human race very rarely stays in the middle of anything, except when they're caught in the middle.

They're moving from one extreme to another constantly. For instance, dresses, but we won't go into that. After the First World War, I saw the girls walking around dressed just as they're dressed today.

The pendulum has swung once more. Well, have your fun, girls, have your fun. But the pendulum swings from one extreme to another.

And the other extreme is, and it's the extreme we're in danger of in our school of thought, we so fear the first error, that salvation is by good works, that we rule out good works as a part of the Christian system. There's a great danger there, my brethren. Yet through the atonement in Christ's blood, here's the formula, and this is a faithful saying, and worthy of much repetition, that through the atonement in Christ's blood, we are saved by grace through faith unto good works.

There's your formula. You can put that down. Through the atonement in Christ's blood, we are saved by grace through faith unto good works.

Now, the New Testament says, 2 Corinthians 9.8, that we are to abound in every good work. Hebrews 13.21, Paul prays, or the writer prays, that God will make us perfect in every good work. Acts 9.36 says, Dorcas was full of good works which she planned to do.

Am I accurate? Dorcas was full of good works which she planned to do. Is that right? What does it say? She was full of good works which she did. I like that.

Again, nobody put that in. I'd rule that out, of course. Anybody would, correcting papers, would rule it out.

But the Holy Ghost said, Dorcas was full of good works which she did. But many of us Christians are full of good works which we hope to do after vacations over. And then, Ephesians 2.10, we're created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

First Timothy 2, women should not adorn themselves with outward adorning, but rather with good works. First Timothy 5, let not a widow be taken in. Now, remember, this was the old folks' home in the early

Church.

And when a Christian woman came to the door with her application blank, they said, who have you got for reference? She said, well, I'll give them a pastor, and Paul knew me and Timothy knew me. They checked with Paul and Timothy, and they said, did she do good works and did she wash the same feet? And if they said yes, they took her in. If they said no, they said, we're sorry, Grandma, but we can't take you in.

You haven't got a life of good works back of you. Can you imagine that? Wouldn't that empty some of our old folks' homes? The only thing, the only qualification to get into the average denomination of old folks' home is just to be old. That's all you have to be, just be old and you can get in, if you have the money.

But their qualification was they had to be filled with good works, and had to have a record behind them of having served the Saints and looked after the Church and prayed and loved and labored in the Kingdom of God, or else they wouldn't take them in. They didn't believe they were Christian. They could carry their big Bible under their arm, but they still didn't believe they were Christian.

They said, no, sorry. A Christian is one who is saved by grace through faith under good works, and good works is the only part she can see, you know. Everything else is submerged, invisible.

Grace is invisible, faith is invisible. How do I know you have faith? You say you have, how do I know you have? You say you believe in the grace of God, how do I know you do? There's only one proof, good works. Paul didn't say, don't take any old lady in unless she testifies that she was a believer.

He didn't say that. He said, don't take her in unless she has a record of good works behind her. She's been a hard-working Christian.

Because, you see, if you come to be 65 or 70 or 80 or whatever it is, years old, and you're ready to retire and go to a long home, if you haven't shown by that time, by your works, that you're a true believer, you're not a true believer. That was Paul's argument. In Hebrews 10.24, the Holy Ghost says, provoke until love and good works.

And that's what I'm trying to do this morning. I'm provoking you. And I may provoke some of you too, but you'll get over it.

Then Acts 10.38 said that God anointed Jesus Christ of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and power who went around doing good works, doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil. So I gave you some scriptures here to show, nine of them, plus the text which is 10, and we could find many, many more to show that while nobody's saved by good works, everybody is saved under good works. And if we're not saved under good works, we're not saved at all.

Could my tears forever flow? Could I go into the desert and starve to death in a cave? Could I give my body to be burned? Could I distribute all my goods to feed the poor? If I had not faith in Jesus Christ as my dying Lord and risen Savior, I'd perish. Could I preach a lifetime? I'd be a castaway myself unless I trust in the merits of Jesus, but alone for my salvation. Grace is a charming sound harmonious to the ears.

And how sweet it is to know that the grace of God saves us without works and without merits. But the devil gets behind that, and from behind that he whispers, now look out for good works. Watch it, watch it, watch it, don't do any good works.

It's enough that you go to church and sing. The Bible teaches that if you're saved by grace, through faith, you'll do good works. What kind of good works? Well, of course, they vary with the age in which you live, and they vary with the opportunities, but I'm quite sure it isn't putting your money in the basket.

That's one of them, of course. But I believe that God's people ought to be the busiest helpers in the whole world. I think that we ought to be.

I believe a lot of lodges exist today because the church hasn't done her part. Believe it. Some Christian men say, yes, I belong to a lodge, but I don't attend it.

I only have it for its insurance value and because there are good works. I believe that if the church of Christ had listened to Paul's faithful saying and had had it understood that as soon as you're converted, you go to work to help mankind, never would have been one of those lodges right in Christendom. It wouldn't have been needed.

But as long as we think that salvation is by grace, through faith, under sitting down, why, we'll have to have outside help. A French or Swiss writer, I think he writes in French, but a Swiss writer by the name of Rougement, has said a very beautiful and wonderful thing. I bought his book the other day and I've only read two or three pages, but I got this out of it.

He said, God Almighty says, I am he that is. And the devil says, I am not. He says, God works by asserting his being and the devil by denying his.

So he says the devil gets hold of us by denying he exists. And so why be afraid of a non-existent thing? Why be afraid of someone that's merely an old wives' tale or a ghost or a spook or a harpy? The devil hides behind not anonymity but non-existence and whispers, I don't exist. Then goes to work on people.

Now, I believe the devil has been busy behind his screen of non-existence, as we people so learned and sophisticated that we don't believe in the devil, but we believe the devil has gotten his work in. So that Christians are not doing good works. Paul said they should be, and Paul set an example by using thread and needle.

George said it by using thread and needle. Others went about giving of their goods. The centuries have shown how the Church can labor and work.

My dear friends, you ought so to live that somebody somewhere in the earth will have you to thank at the end of the day. You should so labor and work and sacrifice, pour in your money and your sweat into something helpful to mankind, to alleviate human suffering, assuage human grief, and give light to the blind. You should so live that in that great day they'll know you're Christians and they won't have to say, are you a believer? Have you got the right doctrine about grace? They'll look at your good works and know that anybody that wasn't saved by grace through faith would never live like that.

And they'll say, okay. Faith saves you by grace through the blood of the Lamb. But after you're saved, you're not to sit down on what the old country people call the stool of do nothing.

You're to get up and get busy. Dave Lutzweiler wrote an article saying that Christianity was a layman's movement, that every Christian ought to be active. I've already gotten a two-page blister on that.

Two-page blister. But I still believe it. I read the article, made a few suggested changes, and printed it.

Every child of God should be busy. That's something. If you can't sing, don't try to sing, please.

Don't try to sing. So many of God's people want to be used of the Lord, but they want to sing. Well, if you can't sing, don't try to sing.

But there's something you can do. You can turn the pages for the organ. You can do that.

You can do something. Find out what to do. And don't say, oh, there's nothing for us young people to do.

You don't have to organize things. Do them. Do them, brother.

Do them. You're intelligent, sister. You read up.

You know. You're alive in the world. You're a 20th century person.

You know where the needs are. And if you don't know where they are, you know how to find out where they are. Therefore, see to it that you work in the name of Jesus Christ, the labor of love, and get good works behind you.

The only way we'll know you're a Christian, you know you're a Christian, you say, by your faith and by your witness. Very good, and I believe in both. But we'll never be sure you're a Christian unless we see you laboring for the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and love.

So while we can have good works of a kind, as I've said, without being saved, you can't be truly saved and not have some kind of good work. Over at Summit Grove, I met a man, 48 years old, a Mr. Henry P. Kurtz, photographer by trade or profession, whichever that is. Makes his living that way, and he had come to the camp meeting for the purpose of taking down the sermons on tape.

And as soon as he could get to me, he said, Do you know, Brother Tozer, I've been converted just a year and a half, and do you know how I converted? I was converted by hearing a tape recording of a sermon you preached. You know, now the tape recording, of course, I might have been asleep at the time he was hearing that. But while that tape recording was being made, I was pouring something into it.

And before it was being made, I was getting ready for it and pouring something into that. So I think that when the Lord comes to give every man according to the deeds done in the body, he won't give that reward to a hunk of celluloid. He will know somebody was back to that praying, laboring, and preparing.

I hope to meet a lot more like that. I hope you'll meet a lot like that, and I believe you will. I believe you will.

I don't mean to scold you. I believe you will. But some of you need to be provoked because you just sit around.

In God's name, Brethren and Sisters, let's hear this faithful saying, that he that believes in God should be careful to practice good works. Amen.

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