

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (7-1-1996 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 2:10

Additional Reading: Matthew 7:1-20

God works in the life of the Christian

Introduction

We have studied great truths which lie at the very heart of the Gospel. Bible Christianity is a complete contradiction to ideas of man on the street. Very antithesis to his estimate. His attitude is that by doing his best, helping his neighbour, giving to good causes, doing anything for anyone, he will earn God's favour. So he thinks it is alright to turn back on God, laugh at His people, reject His word, scorn His day – the main thing is being kind and helpful and loving.

However the Bible says the man on the street has got it all wrong. All these good works are nothing special, for he ought to be doing them anyway. Furthermore, good works do not remove condemnation, or take away sins and forgive the past. Still to answer for life which has excluded God and rejected His claims. Justice of God – the wages of sin is death. Nothing you can do can reverse His sentence. Therefore desperately need a Saviour.

Christ is that Saviour. He died for sinners. Bore guilt and penalty. No point in trusting in good works, but cast self on His grace and mercy. Good works will not buy off God's condemnation.

But then question arises – are good works unimportant then? Once saved, can you live as you like? Does character matter? As we look at this subject of the place of good works, note that the kind of good works the Bible speaks of is different from the world's estimate and its boasts. The good works the bible speaks of are simply beyond our strength and ability. Only possible because of God's work in our souls.

Place of Good works in Christian life

Once saved, forgiven, in family of God, can you live as you like? **Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means!** (Romans 6:1). Paul recoils in horror at the very idea. Once a person has repented and yielded life to Christ, his life should overflow with good works. The Bible's description of the Christian life: **Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven** (Matthew 5:16); **Abound to every good work** (2 Corinthians 9:8); **Bearing fruit in every good work** (Colossians 1:10); **Eager to do what is good** (Titus 2:14); **Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased** (Hebrews 13:16); **All Scripture is God-breathed... that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work** (2 Timothy 3:16-17); Dorcas described as **always doing good** (Acts 9:36); **By this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit** (John 15:8).

Not saved by good works, but once saved, our lives to abound and over flow with good works. Not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. These are the means

whereby we say thank you to God for saving us. **You may declare the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his wonderful light** (1 Peter 2:9). These are a means of commending the Gospel. What we are speaks more loudly than what we say. But above all, good works provide evidence of our repentance and faith. Shows that we have repented of a life of self being number one, that our life is now yielded to Christ. Now it is unthinkable that we could be indifferent to Christian character and good works. Once born of the Spirit, then bear fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Good works, God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Eternally planned. **By their fruits you will recognize them. Every good tree bears good fruit** (Matthew 7:16-17). **Faith without deeds is useless** (James 2:20). **Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did** (1 John 2:6). **We know we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers** (1 John 3:14). **We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands** (1 John 2:3).

The man who is not concerned with character and good works, but claims he is saved, does not know what he is talking about. No right to claim any such thing if there is no evidence. Martin Lloyd Jones: “The evangelical Christian should be outstanding for his sheer personal goodness and capacity for social and public righteousness.” Politicians today boast of their achievements, but they are only building on foundations laid centuries ago by evangelical Christians – social welfare, care for orphans, children, poor and down-trodden, status and dignity of women, beginnings of popular education, hospitals, humanitarians works of various kinds, even public parks, allotments and public libraries – have their origins in work of evangelical Christians and frequently were the fruit of Revivals.

The Gospel of grace, properly understood, encourages and spurs people on to good works as never before.

But what exactly is a good work?

Actually more rare than people think. Very different from good works the world boasts of. Not talking about the occasional kindness, the occasional act of generosity, usually demonstrated towards someone in the same family or circle of friends who will be able to return the good turn. Nor the “good work” that is concerned with own reputation, to create good impression, to show one’s self living up to certain standards, nor motivated by attempt to win standing or favour with God. Nor is it doing a duty which has been inculcated into him as a child – “England expects every man to do his duty”.

The Bible shows a different kind of good work. Doing good, not because it is linked with self in some way. But doing good because God has required it, out of love for Him, and desire to call attention to Him – to glorify God and lift up His name. **Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God** (1 Corinthians 10:31). Not just *what* you do, but *why* you do it. Motive? What is behind it all?

Another way of putting it: **Christ is formed in you** (Galatians 4:19); **Conformed to the likeness of His Son** (Romans 8:29); **Christ lives in me** (Galatians 2:20). The Christian is not just outwardly good and decent man, someone a bit better than

everyone else. No! He is like Christ. He has the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). He displays the same love which Christ displayed, forgetting self, as Christ did, living out the teaching of Jesus. Not just what we are on the outside, but concerned with state of heart, motives and inner desires.

Loving God with all heart, mind, soul, and loving neighbour as self. N.B. neighbour includes enemies. Not occasional good turn or doing the decent thing from time to time, but loving him as yourself. Forgetting self in concern for others. **Like God in true righteousness and holiness** (Ephesians 4:24) – not occasional act of goodness when it is convenient. Good works sprinkled with blood of Jesus. Without God in our actions, there is always some imperfection about what is done, some mixed motive. The goodness which God requires is absolutely impossible until God's grace has touched the life. Unconverted man has never performed one good deed by God's standards. Hoping to be saved by his good life is total impossibility. Augustine said unconverted man's "good deeds" were no more than "splendid sins", and Ferguson, in his puritan commentary, described them as "shining sins". Need to be forgiven for these "good works" as much as his bad deeds.

Back again to state of unconverted man. Hopeless plight he is in. Not only his violation of God's commandments in thought, word and deed. But even his good works that he is relying on are not truly good in God's sight. **There is no one righteous, not even one. No one who seeks after God. All have turned away. There is no one who does good, not even one** (Romans 3:10-12).

Secret and Source of good works

Again and again, as we examine teaching of Scripture and look at it in detail, we see man's situation is desperate. Shut up to grace of God and mercy of God and power of God – else his case is absolutely lost. Not only needs grace to remove condemnation, set him free from slavery, give him new life in place of death – but also to recreate and totally transform him. Only then will he produce kind of good works pleasing to God.

Whole work of saving men is from God's grace and power from first to last. We are His workmanship $\pi\omicron\upsilon\tau\eta\mu\alpha$, His poem, His handiwork, His masterpiece, His work of art. We do not make ourselves Christians. Created in Christ Jesus. New creation in Christ. Have to be a new man in Christ before obtaining righteousness and true holiness.

God made man, and when man sinned, God went after him, sent His prophets to reveal Himself. God sent His Son. God in Christ made atonement for sins. God sent Holy Spirit into men's hearts applying His salvation, giving life, enabling them to repent and believe, to be changed into image of Christ. God gave the word causing men to be sanctified by truth. God raises up preachers of the word, pastors and teachers for perfecting the saints. God opens mind so that they receive His truth. He feeds souls with His word and truth. When His people disobey and falter, God chastises and chastens them. And God keeps on working in lives. **He who has begun a good work will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus** (Philippians 1:6).

So He keeps on making us more and more like Christ and we produce the good works God requires of His people. Being a Christian is God's work from first to last. He saves us because He has given His Son. Sets us free. Gives us life, makes us new people. We are clay in the Father's hands as He forms and fashions us.

Need to change whole thinking about Christian life. We have our conception of it, constantly put selves in centre. "I decided for Christ" – we give the impression that it was us who started the whole process. Then we so often think of God as passive. He waits for us to approach Him. If I go to God, He will bless me. We think activity's first step is always ours, God is just waiting for us to take the first step. He merely responds to us. But the emphasis here is that God is the real worker in our lives. Being a Christian is not about what I have done. It is God who takes the initiative. He begins to deal with us. He disturbs us, convicts us of our need, shows us Christ. So we decide in response to His prompting. Aware we are new people in Him. Thirst and desire for Him. He prompts us to pray and read His word. He enables us to respond in obedience, and to live like Christ, producing those good works He requires. God forming, changing, shaping, fashioning us, as clay in potter's hands. And when we resist and ignore Him, then we feel His chastening hand, things work against us and upset us to bring us back to Himself.

And as part of this whole process, we produce those good works out of love for Him, fruit of the Spirit, Christ is formed in us with new love for God and others. All is a result of His work in our lives. God, His work, His grace, His power, to be seen in centre of our lives. God saving us, giving us new life, creating us again in Christ Jesus, giving us new nature, enabling us to live in obedience to Christ with changed motives, and as Jesus lived.

Conclusion

Tie all these things together and bringing all points into unity – saved by God's grace alone because Christ died for us. Good works not ground for our salvation. Flow from being saved. And proof we are Christians. Not world's understanding of good works. The good works we must demonstrate have depth and motivation which comes from God's power in our lives. Part of greater process whereby God works in our lives, makes us Christians, and continues to work in us as potter and master worker, and will do so till we see Him face to face.

Christian, do you see the glory and wonder and greatness of Christian life. Do you realize who and what you are? Do you experience the privilege and joy? Do you have a sense of wonder of God at work in your life, raising you, giving you new life? Are you aware of His presence? Do you know you are God's workmanship? Do you desire holiness, like Christ, separate from the world?

To those not Christians, see the folly of obsession with self – I, me, my plans, my importance, my works. Stop excluding God from life. Ask Him to save you because Christ died for you. Ask Him to control your life, take hold, change, transform, recreate, enable you to live out of love for Him and others, to the praise of His glory and grace.