

God's Grace in a Sinful World by Geoffrey Bingham

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at Christie's Beach, Adelaide on 26 June, 2000¹*

1. There are no good works, except the works wrought in and through us by God.

Christ is our teacher in this. He said:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works (John 14:10).

Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him' (John 8:28–29).

Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel' (John 5:19–20).

These statements tell us Christ knew the only works he should do were those which were the will of the Father and thus which the Father enabled him to do. It certainly should be no less with us.

2. We have been created and also re-created for doing good works.

Ephesians 2:8–10 tells us this:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

O LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us, thou hast wrought for us all our works (Isaiah 26:12).

All that we have accomplished You have done for us (Motyer).

3. The only works God wants us to do are those of doing His will.

'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Works done according to the Father's will are works done in love. Works that are not love-works are not true works, acceptable by God, for love is holy.

A CONCLUSION: ALL HUMANS, BECAUSE CREATED OF GOD, SHOULD DO HIS WILL

The mandate God gave Man in the Eden (Gen. 1:28–29) means that only works done in accordance with this are God's works, that is, are 'good works'. We can see what seem to be good works to us, but if they are done outside of the will of God, they are not good works. In I Corinthians 3:10–15 Paul says:

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According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— *each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it*, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Only God knows the works. Mark 4:22, 'For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light'.

In Jesus' seven Letters to the Churches in Asia each one contains this statement, 'I know thy works'. One example is: 'And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: "The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. 'I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead' "' (Rev. 3:1).

The works not done by love are reprehensible in Revelation 2:5, 'Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent'. In Revelation 14:13 we read, 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for *their deeds follow them!*"'

CAN WE JUDGE PEOPLE BY THEIR WORKS?

We are warned against certain forms of judgment. Romans 2:1–2 is a case in point:

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things.

Since Eden, with our new so-called knowledge of good and evil, we all want to be judges. We spend much of our lives judging people. We have seen above that God alone knows the heart, and He judges with righteous judgment. In Matthew 7:21–23 Jesus stated the manner:

'Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evil-doers."'

Just previous to this Jesus had been speaking of fruit bearing—good and bad. He said:

'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits' (Matt. 7:15–20).

In Acts 20:29 Paul addressed the Ephesians elders and said, 'I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them'. The test of fruit is: 'and your fruit shall remain' (John 15:16).

All of this teaches us to be careful not to judge, but to wait on God for a true understanding of others. As for their works, we must leave them in the hands of God. At best we can test on the basis of fruit.

HOW, THEN, SHALL WE VIEW ALL MEN?

We shall view them in the way that God does. Matthew 5:43–48 is the principle:

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

We must love all men, no matter what their state. Our whole lives should be given to loving and serving them. They are our brothers and sisters in Adam. They are God's covenant people though they know it not. If they do what they think is good then we should not discourage them by judging and criticising. 'Do good to all men' is the order of life. If we give categories to them such as 'Good', 'Not so good', 'Fair', 'Average', or 'Evil' then we will be taking God's place. In the parables, Jesus spoke of punishments and rewards which shall be given according to the works of people. He spoke of 'few stripes' and 'many stripes'. We must understand all these matters in their proper contexts. Love is the one criterion to measure all works, and that love must always be holy love.