

THE MAINTENANCE OF GOOD WORKS

NO. 2042

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“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving many lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. That being justified by His Grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying and these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.”
Titus 3:3-8.

LAST Thursday evening my sermon was based upon the contrast in the second chapter of Ephesians, between the expressions “not of works” and “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” I tried to show the true place of good works in connection with salvation. Many of you were not present then and I felt that the subject was of such extreme importance that I must return to the same line of thought in this greater congregation. I shall endeavor by another text which contains the same contrast, to set before you the usefulness, the benefit, yes, and the absolute *necessity* for our abounding in good works if indeed we are saved by faith in Christ Jesus.

Let us come at once to our text. Our Apostle tells us that we are to speak evil of no man but to show meekness unto all men. And he adds this as an all-sufficient reason—we ourselves also were sometimes like the very worst of them. When we look upon the world today, it pains us by its folly, disobedience and delusion. He that knows most of this modern Babylon, whether he observes the richer or the poorer classes of society, will find the deepest cause for grief. But we cannot condemn with bitterness—for such were some of us. Not only can we not condemn with bitterness but we must look upon our sinful fellow creatures with great compassion—for such were some of us.

Yes more—we feel encouraged to *hope* for ungodly men, even for the foolish and disobedient—for we ourselves also were, not long ago, like they. We feel that we must give the thought of our heart and the energy of our lives to the great work of saving men out of gratitude to the Lord our God, who, in His kindness and love, has saved us. “I am a man,” said one, “and everything that has to do with men concerns me”—but the child of God adds to this, “I am also a sinful man and owe my cleansing to the loving favor of the Lord. I was in the same mire of sin as these are in—and if I am now washed in the laver of regeneration and renewed by the Holy Spirit, I owe it all to Sovereign Grace and am bound by love to man and love to God to seek the cleansing and renewal of my fellow men.”

Eyes that have wept over our own sin will always be most ready to weep over the sins of others. If you have judged yourselves with candor, you will not judge others with severity. You will be more ready to pity than to condemn, more anxious to hide a multitude of sins than to punish a single sinner. I will give little for your supposed regeneration if there is not created in you a tender heart which can truly say—

*“My God, I feel the mournful scene;
 My heart yearns over dying men;
 And gladly my pity would reclaim,
 And snatch the firebrands from the flame.”*

With this feeling towards mankind at large, we are led to consider the Divine remedy for sinfulness and to look with pleasure upon what God has devised for the creation of holiness in a fallen race. He at first created man a pure and spot-

less being. When He placed Adam in the garden He made a friend of him. And though Adam has fallen and all his race are depraved, God is still aiming at the same thing, namely, to create holy beings, purified unto Himself, to be a peculiar people zealous for good works. What has the Lord done? What is He still doing to this end? How far have we participated in those processes of Divine Grace which work towards this glorious design?

I ask your attention this morning while I speak, first, of what we were. And here let the tears stand in your eyes. Secondly, of what has been done for us—and here let Divine Grace move in your hearts. And, thirdly, of what we wish to do—and here let care be seen in your lives.

I. First, Beloved, let us think for a few minutes only OF WHAT WE ONCE WERE. Think, I say, with tears of repentance in our eyes. “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving many lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” The Apostle does not say, “You yourselves,” as if he spoke to Titus and the believing Cretans but *we ourselves*, thus including himself. Beloved Apostle, you do humbly present to us this bitter cup of confession, drinking of it yourself with us and putting yourself on a level with us—“We ourselves also.” Come, then, pastor, elders, deacons, and members of the Church—you that have served your Lord for many years—hesitate not to join in this humiliating confession.

A threefold set of evils is here described. The first set consists of the evils of the mind—“We were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived.” We were foolish. We thought we knew and therefore we did not learn. We said, “We see,” and therefore we were blind and would not come to Jesus for sight. We thought we knew better than God. For our foolish heart was darkened and we imagined ourselves to be better judges of what was good for us than the Lord our God. We refused heavenly warnings because we dreamed that sin was pleasant and profitable. We rejected Divine Truth because we did not care to be taught and disdained the lowly position of a disciple sitting at Jesus’ feet.

Our pride proved our folly. What lying things we tried to believe! We put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter—darkness for light and light for darkness. In thought, desire, language and action “we were sometimes foolish.” Some of us were manifestly foolish for we rushed headlong into sins which injured us and have left that in our bones which years have not been sufficient to remove. Every lover of vice is a fool at large. O my Brothers and Sisters, I suppose you have no photograph of yourself as you used to be. But if you have, take it down and study it and bless God that He has made you to differ so greatly from your former self!

In addition to being foolish we are said to have been disobedient. And so we were, for we forsook the commands of God. We wanted our own will and way. We said, “Who is the Lord, that we should obey His voice?” There is a touch of Pharaoh about every one of us. Obedience is distasteful to the obstinate. And we were such. “I knew,” said God, “that you were very obstinate and had an iron sinew.” Our necks by nature refused to bow to the yoke of our Creator. We would, if we could, be the lords of Providence for we were not content with the Divine allotment. We wished that we were the legislators of the universe, that we might give license to our own lusts and no longer be hampered with restrictions.

To the holy Law of God we were disobedient. Ah, how long some of us were disobedient to the Gospel! We heard it as though we heard it not. Or when it did touch the heart we did not allow its influence to remain. Like water, which retains no mark of a blow, so did we obliterate the effect of the Truth of God. We were determined not to be obedient to the faith of the Lord Jesus. We were unwilling to yield God His due place either in Providence, Law, or Gospel. Paul adds that we were deceived, or led astray. As sheep follow one another and go away from the pasture, so did we follow some chosen companion and would not follow the Good Shepherd. We were deceived.

Perhaps we were deceived in our thoughts and made to believe a lie—certainly we were deceived in our idea of happiness. We hoped to find it where it did not exist—we searched for the living among the dead. We were the dupes of custom and of company. We were here, there, and everywhere in our actions—no more to be relied upon than lost sheep. Children of God, remember these errors of your minds. Lay them upon your consciences and let your souls plead guilty to them. For I feel assured that we have all, in some measure, been in this triple condition—foolish, disobedient, deceived.

The next bundle of mischief is found in the evil of our pursuits. The Apostle says we were “serving many lusts and pleasures.” The word for “serving” means being under servitude. We were once the slaves of many lusts and pleasures. By lusts we understand desires, longings, ambitions, passions. Many are these masters and they are all tyrants. Some are

ruled by greed for money. Others crave for fame. Some are enslaved by lust for power—others by the lust of the eye. And many by the lusts of the flesh. We were born slaves and we live slaves until the great Liberator emancipates us. No man can be in worse bondage than to be enslaved by his own evil desires.

We were also the bond slaves of pleasure. Alas, alas, that we were so far infatuated as to call it pleasure! Looking back at our former lives we may well be amazed that we could once take pleasure in things we are now ashamed. The Lord has taken the very name of our former idols out of our mouths. Some who are now saints were once the slaves of drunkenness or of “chambering and wantonness.” Some were given up to evil company and rioting or to pride and self-seeking. Many are the evils which array themselves in the silken robes of pleasure that they may tempt the hungry heart of man.

Once we took pleasure in those sins which are now our misery as we look back on them. O my Brethren, we dare not deny our base original! Today we drink from the well of holiness and not of undefiled pleasures which delight our souls. But we blush as we remember that not too long ago foul and putrid pools seemed sweet to our vitiated taste. Like Nebuchadnezzar in the failure of his mind we fed among beasts in the madness of our sin. Unlike the Egyptians, who loathed to drink of the river when God had smitten it with His curse, we took all the more delight in draughts of unhallowed pleasure because it yielded a fearful intoxication to know that we were daring to defy a Law.

Do not let me talk about these things this morning while you listen to me without feeling. I want you to be turning over the pages of your old life and joining with Paul and the rest of us in our sad confession of former pleasure in evil. A holy man was likely to carry with him a book which had three leaves in it but never a word. The first leaf was black and this showed his sin. The second was red and this reminded him of the way of cleansing by blood—while the third was white—to show how clean the Lord can make us. I beg you just now to study that first black page. It is all black. And as you look at it, it seems blacker and blacker. What seemed at one time to be a little white, darkens down as it is gazed upon, till it wears the deepest shade of all. You were sometimes erring in your minds and in your pursuits. Is not this enough to bring the water into your eyes, O you that now follow the Lamb wherever He goes?

The Apostle then mentions the evils of our hearts. Here you must discriminate and judge, each one for himself, how far the accusation lies. He speaks of “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” That is to say first, we harbored anger against those who had done us evil. And secondly, we lived in envy of those who appeared to have more good than we had ourselves. The first sin is very common—many abide year after year in the poisonous atmosphere of an angry spirit. All are not alike in this, for some are naturally easy and agreeable. But in all of us there is that proud spirit which resents injuries and would revenge them. Men may sin against God and we are not indignant. But if they sin against us—we are very angry.

To the spirit of Christ it is natural and even delightful to forgive—but such is not the spirit of the world. I have heard of men who would not forgive their own children and of brothers who were implacable towards each other. This is the spirit of the devil. Revenge is the delight of the wicked but to do kindness in return for injury is the luxury of a Christian. One main distinction between the heirs of God and the heirs of wrath is this—the unregenerate are in the power of self and so of hate—but the regenerate are under the dominion of Christ and so of love. You may judge yourself by this—whether your prevailing spirit is that of wrath or of love—if you are given to anger, you are a child of wrath. And if you are full of love, you are a child of God whose name is Love.

God help us to stamp out the last spark of personal animosity! Let us remove the memories of injury, as the incoming tide washes out the marks on the sand. If any of you have disputes in your family, end them at once, cost what it may. How can you love God whom you have not seen if you do not love your brother whom you have seen? Divine Grace makes a great change in this respect in those who by nature are malicious.

The other form of evil is envy of those who seem to have more of good than we have. Frequently envy attacks men because of their wealth. How dare they have luxuries when we are poor? At other times envy spits its venom against a man’s good repute when he happens to be more praised than we are. How can any man venture to be better thought of than we are? Truly this is the spirit of Satan—the spirit which now works in the children of disobedience. The child of God is delivered from envy by the Grace of God. And if it ever does arise, he hates himself for admitting it. He would wish to see others happy even if he were unhappy himself.

If he is in the depths of poverty he is glad that everybody is not so pinched as he is. If he has received unjust censure he is willing to hope that there was some mistake. And he is glad that everybody is not quite so unfairly dealt with. He rejoices in the praise of others and triumphs in their success. What? Do you wince at this and feel that you have not reached it so far? May Divine Grace enable you to get into this spirit for it is the spirit of Jesus! Beloved, sin takes different shapes in different people but it is in us all. This darkness once beclouded those who today shine like stars among the godly. Sin is often restrained by circumstances and yet it is in the heart.

We ought not to take credit to ourselves because of our freedom from evils into which we had no chance of falling. We have not been so bad as others because we could not be. A certain boy has run away from home. Another boy remained at home. Is he, therefore, a better child? Listen—he had broken his leg and could not get out of bed. That takes away all the credit of his staying at home. Some men cannot sin in a certain direction and then they say to themselves, “What excellent fellows we are to abstain from this wickedness!” Sirs, you would have done it if you could, and therefore your self-praise is mere flattery. Had you been placed in the same position as others, you would have acted as others have done—for your heart goes after the same idols.

Sin in the heart of every man defiles everything that he does. Even if an ungodly man should do what in itself might be a good action there is a defilement in his motive which taints it all. You cannot draw pure water from a foul well. As is the heart, such is the life. Listen to this, you that have never passed under the processes of Divine Grace. See what you are and where you are if left to yourselves and cry to the Lord to save you.

II. Now for a more cheerful topic. We are now to think OF WHAT HAS BEEN DONE FOR US. And here let us feel the movements of Divine Grace in our hearts. What has been done for us?

First, there was a Divine interposition. “The kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared.” Man was in the dark—plunging onward to blacker midnight every step he took. I do not find, as I read history, any excuse for the modern notion that men are longing for God and laboring to find Him. No, the sheep were never seeking the Shepherd but all were going astray. Men everywhere turn their backs to the light and try to forget what has been handed down by their forefathers—they are everywhere feeling after a great lie which they may raise to the Throne of God. We do not, by nature, long after God nor sigh for His holiness. The gracious Lord came in uncalled for and unsought and in the bounty of His heart and in the great love of His nature He determined to save man.

Methinks I hear Him say, “How shall I give you up?” He sees mankind resolved to perish unless an almighty arm shall intervene. And He interposes in fullness of pity and power. You know how, in many ways, the Lord has intervened on our behalf. But, especially you remember how He came down from Heaven, took our nature, lived among us, mourned our sin and bore it in His own body on the tree. You know how the Son of God interposed in that grand Avatar, that marvelous incarnation in which the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Then He broke what would otherwise have been an everlasting darkness.

Then He snapped the chains which would have fettered our humanity throughout all the ages. The love and kindness of God our Savior which had always existed, at length “appeared,” when God, in the Person of His Son, came here, met our iniquities hand to hand and overcame their terrible power—that we also might overcome. Note well that there was a Divine salvation. In consequence of the interposition of Jesus, Believers are described as being saved—“not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saved us.”

Hearken to this. There are men in the world who are saved—they are spoken of not as “to be saved,” not as to be saved when they come to die but saved even now—saved from the dominion of the evils which we described under our first head—saved from folly, disobedience, delusion and the like. Whosoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ whom God has set forth to be the Propitiation for sin is saved from the guilt and power of sin. He shall no longer be the slave of his lusts and pleasures. He is saved from that dread bondage. He is saved from hate—for he has tasted love and learned to love. He shall not be condemned for all that he has ever done, for his great Substitute and Savior has borne away the guilt, the curse, the punishment of sin—yes, the sin itself.

O my Hearers, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning you are saved! As surely as once you were lost, being led astray—so surely are you now saved, if you are a Believer, being found by the great Shepherd and brought back again upon His shoulders. I beg you to get hold of this Truth of God that according to His mercy the Lord has saved us who believe in Jesus. Will you tell me, or rather tell yourselves, whether you are saved or not? If you are not saved you

are lost. If you are not already forgiven you are already condemned. You are in the ruin of fallen nature unless you are renewed by the Holy Spirit. You are a slave to sin unless your liberty has been procured by the great ransom. Examine yourselves on these points and follow me in the next thought.

There was a motive for this salvation. Positively, “According to His mercy He saved us.” And negatively, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” Brethren, we could not have been saved at the first by our works of righteousness. For we had not done any. “No,” says the Apostle, “we were foolish, disobedient, deceived,” and therefore we had no works of righteousness and yet the Lord interposed and saved us. Behold and admire the splendor of His love, that “He loved us even when we were *dead* in sins.” He loved us and therefore quickened us. God does not come to men to help them when they are saving themselves—He comes to the rescue when they are *damning* themselves.

When the heart is full of folly and disobedience the good God visits it with His favor. He comes, not according to the hopefulness of our character, but according to His mercy. And mercy has no eye except for guilt and misery. The Grace of God is not given according to any good thing that we have done since our conversion—the expression before us shuts out all real works of righteousness which we have done since regeneration—as all supposed ones before it. The Lord assuredly foreknew these works but He also foreknew our sins. He did not save us according to the foreknowledge of our good works—these works are a part of the salvation which He gave us.

As well say that a physician healed a sick man because he foreknew that he would be better. Or that you give a beggar an alms because you foresee that he would have the alms. Works of righteousness are the *fruit* of salvation and the root must come *before* the fruit. The Lord saves His people out of clear, unmixed, undiluted mercy and Grace and for no other reason. “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs but of God that shows mercy.”

Oh how splendidly is the Grace of God seen in the whole plan of salvation! How clearly is it seen in our cases, for “we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived,” yet He saved us, “not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy”! Will not some self-convicted sinner find comfort here? O despairing one, does not a little hope come in by this window? Do you not see that God can save you on the ground of *mercy*? He can wash you and renew you according to the sovereignty of His Grace? On the footing of merit you are hopelessly lost—but on the ground of mercy there is hope.

Observe, next that there was a power by which we were saved. “He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” The way in which we are delivered from the dominion of sin is by the work of the Holy Spirit. This adorable Person is very God of very God. This Divine Being comes to us and causes us to be born again. By His eternal power and Godhead He gives us a totally new nature, a life which could not grow out of our former life, nor be developed from our nature—a life which is a new creation of God. We are saved not by evolution but by creation. The Spirit of God creates us anew in Christ Jesus unto good works.

We experience regeneration which means being generated over again, or born again. Remember the result of this as set forth in Covenant terms—“A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you—and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh.” This great process is carried out by the Holy Spirit. After we are regenerated He continues to renew us. Our thoughts, feelings, desires and acts are constantly renewed. Regeneration as the commencement of the new creation can never come twice to any man but renewal of the Holy Spirit is constantly and perpetually repeated.

The life once given is revived—the light once kindled is fed with holy oil which is poured upon it continually. The newborn life is deepened and increased in force by that same Holy Spirit who first of all created it. See then, dear Hearers, that the only way to holiness is to be made anew and to be kept anew. The washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit are both essential. The name of Jesus has been engraved in us—even on our hearts—but it needs to be cut deeper and deeper lest the letters be covered up by the moss of routine, or filled up by the bespattering of sin. We are saved “by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”—one process in different stages. This is what our God has done for us—blessed be His name! Being washed and renewed we are saved.

There is also mentioned a blessed privilege which comes to us by Jesus Christ. The Spirit is shed on us abundantly by Jesus Christ and we are “justified by His Grace.” Both justification and sanctification come to us through the medium of

our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is shed on us abundantly “through Jesus Christ our Savior.” Beloved, never forget that regeneration is worked in us by the Holy Spirit but comes to us by Jesus Christ. We do not receive any blessing apart from our Lord Jesus. In all works of the Spirit, whether regeneration or renewal, it is the Lord Jesus who is putting forth His power, for He says, “Behold, I make all things new.”

The Mediator is the conduit through which Divine Grace supplies us daily with the water of life. Everything is by Jesus Christ. Without Him was not anything made that was made either in Grace or in nature. We must not think it possible for us to receive anything from God apart from the appointed Mediator. But, oh, think of it!—in Jesus Christ we are today abundantly anointed by the Holy Spirit. The sacred oil is shed upon us abundantly from Him who is our Head. We are sweet to God through the Divine perfume of the Holy Spirit who comes to us by Jesus Christ. This day we are just in the sight of God in Christ’s righteousness, through which we are “justified by Grace.”

Jehovah sees no sin for which He must punish us. He has said, “Take away his filthy garments from him and set a fair miter upon his head.” And this is done. We are accepted in the Beloved. Since Jesus has washed our feet, we are “clean every part”—clean in the double sense of being washed with water and with blood and so cleansed from the power and guilt of sin. What a high privilege is this! Can we ever sufficiently praise God for it?

Once more—there comes out of this a Divine result. We become today joint-heirs with Christ Jesus and so heirs of a heavenly estate. And then out of this heirship there grows a hope which reaches forward to the eternal future with exceeding joy. We are “made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Think of that! What a space there is between “foolish, disobedient, deceived”—right up to “heirs according to the hope of eternal life”! Who thought of bridging this great gulf? Who but God? With what power did He bridge it? How but by the Divine power and Godhead of the Holy Spirit? Where was the bridge found by which the chasm could be crossed? The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us, has made a way over the once impassable deep.

I have thus very briefly set before you an outline of the work of Divine Grace within the human heart. Do you understand it? Have you ever felt it? Do you feel the life of regeneration pulsing within you this morning? Will you not bless God for it?—

*“We raise our Father’s name on high,
Who His own Spirit sends
To bring rebellious strangers near,
And turn His foes to friends.”*

III. We will now speak on WHAT WE WISH TO DO. And here let us show care in our lives. Mark well these words, “This is a faithful saying and these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.”

“Be careful to maintain good works.” This precept is full in its meaning. In another Scripture you are told to be careful for nothing but here you are bid to be careful to maintain good works. We read, “casting all your care upon Him. For He cares for you”—but do not cast off your care to maintain good works. You have a number of cares about you—slip a bridle over their heads and train them to plow in the field of good works. Do not let care be wasted over food and raiment and such temporary matters—these may be left with God. But take sacred cares upon you—the cares of holy and gracious living. Yoke your best thoughts to the care of holiness—“be careful to maintain good works.”

What are good works? The term is greatly inclusive. Of course we number in the list works of charity, works of kindness and benevolence, works of piety, reverence and holiness. Such works as comply with the two tables of command are good works. Works of obedience are good works. What you do because God bids you do it, is a good work. Works of love to Jesus done out of a desire for His Glory—these are good works. The common actions of everyday life, when they are well done, with a view not to merit but out of gratitude—these are good works. “Be careful to maintain good works” of every sort and kind.

You are sure to be working in some way—mind you that your works are good works. If you have commenced well, be careful to maintain good works. And if you have maintained them, go on to increase them. I preached last Thursday night as now—salvation by Divine Grace and by Grace alone. And if I know how to speak plainly, I certainly did speak plainly then and I hope I do so now. Remember, you are saved by grace and not by works of righteousness. But *after* you are saved there comes in this precept, “Be careful to maintain good works.”

This precept is special in its direction. To the sinner—that he *may be saved we say not a word concerning good works, except to remind him that he has none*. To the Believer who *is* saved, we say ten thousand words concerning good works—beseeching him to bring forth much fruit, that so he may be Christ's disciple. There is all the difference between the living and the dead—the living we arouse to work—the dead must first receive life. Exhortations which may most fittingly be addressed to the regenerate may be quite out of place when spoken to those who are under the power of unbelief and are strangers to the family of Divine Grace.

The voice of our text is to them that have believed in God—faith is presupposed as the absolutely indispensable foundation of good works. You cannot work that which will please God if you are without faith in Him. As there is no coming to God in prayer without believing that He is and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, so there is no bringing any other sacrifice to Him without a faith suitable to the business in hand. For living works you must have a *living faith* and for loving works you must have a *loving faith*.

When we know and trust God with holy intelligence and sacred confidence we work His pleasure. Good works must be done freely—God wants not slaves to grace His Throne. He seeks not from us the forced works of men in bondage. He desires the spontaneous zeal of consecrated souls who rejoice to do His will because they are not their own but bought with the precious blood of Jesus. It is the heartiness of our work which is the heart of it. To those who have renewed hearts, this exhortation is addressed—“Be careful to maintain good works.”

This precept is weighty in importance, for it is prefaced thus—“This is a faithful saying.” This is one among four great matters thus described. It is not trivial. It is not a temporary precept which belongs to an extinct race and a past age. “This is a faithful saying”—a true Christian Proverb—“that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.” Let the ungodly never say that we who believe in Free Grace think lightly of a holy life. O you who are the people of my care, I charge you before God and the holy angels that in proportion as you hold the Truth of doctrine, you follow out the purity of precept! You hold the Truth of God and you know that salvation is not of man, nor of man's work—it is not of merit—but of mercy, not of ourselves but of God alone.

I beseech you to be as right in practice as in doctrine, and therefore be careful to maintain good works. Dogs will open their mouths but do not find bones for them—the enemies of the faith will laugh at it but do not give them ground of accusation. May God the Holy Spirit help you so to live that they may be ashamed—having no evil thing to say of you!

I am afraid that this precept of being careful to maintain good works is neglected in practice, or else the Apostle would not have said to Titus, “These things I will that you affirm constantly.” Titus must repeat perpetually the precept which commands the careful maintenance of good works. Beloved, I fear that preachers often think too well of their congregations and talk to them as if they were all perfect, or nearly so. I cannot thus flatter you. I have been astounded when I have seen what professing Christians can do. How some dare call themselves followers of Jesus I cannot tell! It is horrible. We condemn Judas but he is to be found in many.

Our Lord is still sold for gain. He still has at His heels sons of perdition who kiss Him and betray Him. There are still persons in our Churches who need to have the Ten Commandments read to them every Sabbath Day. It is not a bad plan of the Church of England—to put up the Ten Commandments near the communion table where they can be clearly seen. Some people need to see them, though I am afraid when they come in their way, they wink hard at some of the Commands and go away and forget that they have seen them. Common morality is neglected by some who call themselves Christians.

My Brethren, such things ought not to be but as long as they are, so we must hear Paul saying—“I will that you affirm constantly that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.” Certain people turn on their heel and say, “That is legal talk. The preacher is preaching up works instead of Divine Grace.” What? Do you dare to say that? I will meet you face to face at God's right hand at the Last Day if you dare to insinuate so gross a libel. Dare you say that I do not preach continually salvation by the Divine Grace of God and by the Divine Grace of God only? Having preached salvation by Grace without a moment's hesitation, I shall also continually affirm that they which have believed in God must be “careful to maintain good works.”

This, mark you, is supported by argument. The Apostle presses home his precept by saying—“These things are good and profitable unto men.” He instances other things which are neither good nor profitable, namely, “Foolish questions and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the Law.” In these days some are occupied with questions about the

future state instead of accepting the plain testimony of Scripture and some give more prominence to speculations drawn from prophecy than to the maintaining of good works. I reverence the prophecies. But I have small patience with those whose one business is guessing at their meaning.

One whose family was utterly unruly and immoral met with a Christian friend and said to him—“Do you quite see the meaning of the Seven Trumpets?” “No,” answered his friend, “I do not. And if you looked more to your seven children the seven trumpets would suffer no harm.” To train up your children and instruct your servants and order your household aright are “things which are good and profitable unto men.” A life of godliness is better than the understanding of mysteries. The eternal Truth of God is to be defended at all hazards but questions which do not signify the turn of a hair to either God or man may be left to settle themselves.

“Be careful to maintain good works” whether you are a babe in Grace or a strong man in Christ Jesus. A holy household is as a pillar to the Church of God. Children brought up in the fear of God are as cornerstones polished after the similitude of a palace. You, husbands and wives that live together in holy love and see your children serving God, you adorn the doctrine of God our Savior! Tradesmen who are esteemed for integrity, merchants who bargain to their own hurt but change not, dealers who can be trusted in the market with uncounted gold—your acts are good and profitable both to the Church and to the world! Men are won to Christ when they see Christianity embodied in the good and the true.

But when religion is a thin veneer or a mere touch of tinsel they call it “humbug.” And rough as the word is, it is worthy of the contemptible thing which it describes. If our religion comes from the very soul, if our life is the life of Christ in us and we prove that we have new hearts and right spirits by acting the honorable, the kindly, the truly Christian part—these things are good and profitable unto those who watch us—for they may induce them to seek for better things.

I pray you, my Beloved, be careful to maintain good works. I thus stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance—if your minds were not pure I would not stir them up—for it would be of no use to raise the mud which now lies quiet. I stir you up because I am not afraid to do so but am sure that it will do you good. You will take home this exhortation and you will say, each one to himself, “What can I do more for Jesus? How can I walk more worthy in my profession? How can I be careful to maintain good works?” So may God bless you!

You who do not believe in God. You who have not come to trust in His dear Son—I am not talking to you. To you I must say, first, that you must be made new creatures. I do not talk to a crab-tree and say, “Bear apples.” It cannot. The tree must first become good before the fruit can be good. “You must be born again.” You will never be better till you are made new creatures. You must be spiritually slain and then made alive again. There must be an end of you and there must be a beginning of Christ in you. God grant that this may happen at once and may you immediately believe in the Lord Jesus! Amen.

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