

# When Works Are Good - Rev. Andrew Coghill

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Preacher: Rev. Andrew Coghill

[ 0 : 00 ] It's in Matthew chapter 5, we read at the verse 16 in the same way, Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

We see from this verse that the purpose of Good Works, capital G, capital W, is to glorify God. That is, of course, part and parcel of man's chief end, isn't it?

To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. But that which we do, the good works that we are enabled by grace to do, their purpose, too, is to glorify God.

Not necessarily that everything good that you do will or indeed should be seen. Some of it will and should be unseen. You know, if we see in chapter 6, if you go across the page at verse 1, Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.

For then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. And at verse 4, So your giving may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you, or reward you openly, as some versions put it.

[ 1 : 16 ] But when you pray, verse 6, Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Again, reward you openly, as some put it.

Then verses 19 to 21, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. But whilst we must take care that we attend to the unseen requirements of our faith, that is, prayer, Bible reading, and study, and so on of it, and giving to the poor and to those in need and to missionary causes and so on, in the same way as the athlete must be diligent in his or her training, or the student and scholar in their studies and revision, which nobody sees.

You know, nobody is really up at four o'clock in the morning when the poor athlete is pounding the road, or going around the track, or in the swimming pool, or whatever it might be. Nobody sees them do that, but they have to be diligent in that.

Nobody really sees the student or the pupil slogging away at their desk when the sun's streaming in their windows, and they'd really rather be outside playing, but there they are having to attend to their studies.

[ 2 : 38 ] Nobody sees. But attending to these unseen things means that we won't be shamed and humiliated when the public events do come, when the athlete is actually competing, when the student is actually sitting his or her exams.

These things which nobody sees, so likewise are required of the Christian in his or her life, so that those things which are public, which everyone sees, will not be an occasion of shame or humiliation for them.

And as we seek to live lives as Christians, we must ensure that our inward and our outward lives are worthy of each other and honoring to the Lord.

If that is then the purpose of good works, to glorify the Lord, which Jesus says it is, you know, as we read in our verse, in the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven, then it follows that we cannot, by definition, do that in a state of unbelief.

We cannot glorify God by anything we do in a state of unbelief. As Hebrews says, chapter 11, verse 6, He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

[ 4 : 07 ] And again, in John 15, verses 4 and 5, Jesus says, Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from Me, ye can do nothing.

That's what Jesus says, apart from Me, you can do nothing. This means that it is impossible to do any good works, in inverted commas, capital G, capital W.

We cannot do any good works in the sight of the Lord in a state of unbelief. A non-Christian cannot, by definition, do anything that would constitute good works, capital G, capital W, in the sight of the Lord.

Good works, in any case, are only those things which God has commanded in His Word, and not things that men have invented or just decided of themselves that this or that should be pleasing to the Lord.

[ 5 : 16 ] You know, if we take a worldly example, supposing you had a husband who said, right, because I love my wife so much, I've got a special gift for her.

And he says to her, darling, I've got this thing, oh, you're really going to love it. And he says, oh, great, what is it? And he says, I've got your special centre stand seats for the International, for Scotland, at Hamden.

And he says, oh, are you coming too? No, no, no, darling, this is just for you. And, well, can I take any friends with you? No, no, no, this is just for you. You're going to sit there centre of the best stand, you'll have the prime seat, you'll love the match.

Well, I'm not really all that much into football, you know, would you not rather do it yourself? Oh, no, I love you so much, I've done this for you. And then if she were to say to him, oh, darling, I love you so much, you'll never get the gift I've got for you, I've got you to go to a health spa, you're going to get your nails done, you're going to get pampered, you're going to get massage, and then you can get saunas, and then you can get your manicure, and pedicure, and a spray on tan, and all these things you could ever want.

He says, um, do I want that? And she says, oh, you'll love it, you know, I've done it myself, it's great, you'll just love this, and well, you know, am I going to take any of the boys with me? He says, no, no, no, it's just for you, you just do it.

[ 6 : 38 ] Now, what is wrong with both of these great, wonderful gifts, is that each person is thinking up, what would I really like, and give it to somebody else, who isn't really all that enthused about it, but they're giving somebody that they themselves would really love.

Now, the heart is good, the heart that wants to give something that they would, really value, that, that's a good, that's a good motivation to have. The only problem is, they're not giving what the person themselves would actually want, they're giving what they themselves would like.

And that is the problem with so much of what men call good works. They're giving something they think God should like, because it pleases them. Not something which God himself has required or commanded in his word.

And the most important thing in the entire Bible, that God wants and commands men and women to do, is to repent of their sins and believe in his son Jesus Christ.

If we're not doing that, which to God is the most important thing of all, then he's not going to be impressed with anything else that we do.

[ 7 : 58 ] Now, this fact is important because so many people build their hopes for any afterlife on a sense of having had and lived what they see as a good life.

You know, having done some good things in it, and as they would see it, having done very little harm, or at least rationalizing that the good in their life outweighs the bad, as they see it.

But the whole point is that without Christ, nothing we do is by definition good, in inverted commas, in the sight of God.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans tells us, chapter 3, verse 23, And our best efforts without Christ continue to be, as St. Augustine put it so many centuries ago, nothing but splendid sins.

They seem splendid to us, but at the end of the day, they're just sins. Now, the church's confession of faith, which all its office bearers subscribe to, often gets criticized for spelling out this fact, as it says in the 16th chapter of good works, in paragraph 7, works done by unregenerate men.

[ 9 : 23 ] Although for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others. Yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner, according to the word, nor to a right end, the glory of God.

They are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet, their neglect of them, is more sinful, and displeasing to God.

Now, sometimes folk, like to make out as though this is some kind of catch-22, damned if you do these things, and then damned if you don't, but all it is saying is, firstly, that everything you do, in a state of sin, is and must be, by definition, sinful.

If you're doing it in a state of sin, it will be, by definition, sinful. The example I always use is that, if you're underwater, everything you do will be wet. It doesn't matter how many towels you take down with you, to the seabed, it doesn't matter how much vigorously you rub yourselves, with all these now soaking wet towels, you are not going to get dry, as long as you continue to be underwater.

In order to get dry, to even begin to get dry, you have to come up out of the water, onto the sand. You have to hope the sun's going to dry. You have to get a dry towel, and actually start drying yourself with it.

[ 10 : 53 ] As long as you are still underwater, you will never, ever, ever, get dry. It just, can't happen. Likewise, if you're rolling about in mud, and say, well it's okay, I'll take bars of soap, in with me, I'll scrub this nice white towel, it's not so white now, but you know, I'll get the soap on, put some water on it, and we'll just roll it about here, in the mud for a while.

As long as you're slowing about in that mud bath, everything you touch, everything you do, is going to be muddy and dirty. Everything you do in a state of sin, everything you do in a state of unbelief, is going to be, by definition, sinful.

It's not rocket science, but that's the truth of it. And secondly, that even if everything is sinful, which it is, some sins are still worse than others.

Even in a state of sin and unbelief, cruelty is still worse than kindness. You might be a kind unbeliever, or you might be a cruel unbeliever.

And it's worse to be cruel, than it is to be kind. Likewise, you know, for example, fairness, is nicer than injustice, even if it's in a state of sin and unbelief.

[ 12 : 10 ] Neglect is worse than attentiveness, adultery is worse than faithfulness, reneging on bills is worse than paying them promptly, and even for Christians. There is a danger that just doing these basic things might puff them up with the idea that they are good.

But listen to what Jesus says, in Matthew 5, verses 46 and 47, if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? And in Luke 6, if you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High.

[ 13 : 17 ] For He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. In Luke 17, at verse 10, we read, Nobody can outgood God.

Nobody can do so much good that God can say, wow, I never thought you'd ever be able to do this much good. Come on, you come into heaven. Look at how great and good you are. Nobody can outgood God or make Him their debtor.

God is no man's debtor. How much less, then, can we count as good works, capital G, capital W, things which God has not Himself commanded or required?

We mentioned previously that good works are only those things which God has commanded in His Word, and not things that men have invented or just decided for themselves. This should just be pleasing to the Lord because it is to us.

You know, in a former age, the church encouraged pilgrimages and veneration of relics or observing certain holy days or saints' days, none of which had any biblical warrant.

[ 14 : 38 ] Nowadays, it is claimed that the church is acting in line with God's will if she's open and inclusive and tolerant enough to regard all religions as equal and all sins as acceptable.

But that is not how God sees it in His Word. In 1 Samuel 15, verse 20, we read, Saul said to Samuel, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord.

I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I brought Agag, the king of Amalek. I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord, O God, in Gilgal.

And Samuel said, Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

Saul said to Samuel, I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.

[ 15 : 47 ] And even where the intention to honor the Lord is genuine and humble. It's not always that which God is going to approve. In 2 Samuel 7, we read in the first couple of verses, The king said to Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.

And Nathan said to the king, Go do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you. And then at verse 7, The Lord answers, In all places where I have moved, with all the people of Israel.

Did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel whom I commanded to shepherd my people? Israel saying, Why have you not built me a house of cedar? In verses 12 and 13, he says, When your days are fulfilled, and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish his throne forever. You would think, Well, why could David not do it? Because God told him that he wasn't to.

Why does it have to be Solomon? Because God said it was going to be. This is what the Lord specifies. The danger of men deciding for themselves what is pleasing to God, rather than having the humility to investigate what he says in his word, is not a new problem.

[17:14] In Matthew 15, we do verses 8 and 9, Jesus said, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

So far, we can establish what good works are most certainly not. They are not works done by unbelieving non-Christian people.

And even what is done by the Lord's people is not necessarily good works, unless God in his word has said it. So what do we classify as good works?

What can we say that they are? Well, Jesus has already given us some examples. In Luke chapter 6, we read from verse 27, But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.

[18:16] And from one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you. And from one who takes away your goods, do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

And from verse 35, But love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down and shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

This is part of the message of the gospel, that because God is no man's debtor, you will never be the pooter for living it out.

[19:18] Let me say that again. Because God is no man's debtor, you will never be the pooter for living out his gospel and his teachings.

It will mean a manner of self-giving. It will mean a measure of self-sacrifice. But that is part of the Christian witness anyway.

We could be having a long lie on the Sabbath, but if we are the Lord's, then our desire is to be in his house at the time of worship. We could be doing our own thing in the middle of the week in our own time, but if we are the Lord's, then prayer together with his people in his house is part of our outward witness, reflecting our inward priority, or lack of it.

We could just keep ourselves to ourselves, or spout whatever gossip or slander we felt like, but that isn't doing good, is it? Not doing what God's Word says anyway, is it?

James chapter 1, we read verse 22, but be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

[ 20 : 35 ] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Giving out of ourselves for the benefit of others because we belong to Christ is part of our witness. It's partly what the New Testament means by that old authorized version word, communicate.

In Hebrews 13, we read verse 16, but to do good and to communicate, forget not. For with such sacrifices, God is well pleased.

In our own version of the ESV here, it reads, do not neglect to do good and to share what you have. For such sacrifices are pleasing to God. It is a sacrifice. It is a giving out of ourselves to those in greater need.

Philippians 4, verse 14, notwithstanding you have done well that you did communicate with my afflictions. And again, our own version that reads, it was kind of you to share my trouble.

[ 21 : 45 ] And again, there is this sense that the Lord gives us of his bounty precisely so that we can give it out and share it. 1 Timothy 6, we read verse 17, as for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

This generosity with his own abundance is what the Lord himself is like. And he wants his children to be like him.

God is generous with his gifts to us. He wants us to be likewise generous with the gifts he gives to us. In Matthew 5, verses 44 and 45, But I say to you, love your enemies, 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 the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Because his children, being like their father, show and prove to the world that they really are truly his.

[ 23 : 14 ] Most parents, if they see their children do something well, and somebody were to say, oh, they're really like you, you know, there's, oh, a real chip off the old block, well, you would feel good because something good was being traced back to you as if they're showing that they are your children by what they do.

Well, I won't say God is no different. God is different from us in the sense he has no vestige of pride or vanity in that sense. But he does have a delight in his children being like him.

That they show that they really are truly his. That pleases him. That honors him. As Jesus teaches us, it glorifies him.

So, if you are truly his, you have so much cause for thankfulness, so much reason to rejoice and to exercise, put to work your faith in practical, merciful, outworkings of witness in your love for him, showing that love for him by your public witness and worship and in your love for others, remember what Jesus said about the two greatest commandments of all.

Mark 12, verse 29, Jesus answered, the most important commandment of all is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God.

[ 24 : 50 ] The Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no other commandment greater than these. And in chapter 22, verse 40 of Matthew, he says, On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. Him first. And then your neighbor as yourself afterwards. The outworking of love to God is love for others in that regard.

On these two hang all the law and the prophets. This light was meant to shine. So, let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

This light is meant to shine. Christians are meant to be doing good and it will inevitably be seen and be known about without trumpets, without broadcasting, without boasting.

[ 26 : 07 ] It will out because if a house is dark that there is light in a room, then, or even outside shining in, even through a shut door, it shines through every little crack and vent into the darkness.

You can't stop the light from eking out through every little crack, every little vent, every little hole. The light will come out. It will be seen in the midst of the darkness.

And it lightens it just a little. And it shows where the light is coming from. And the more the door or the curtains are opened, the more the light comes in.

That is part of why Christians are in the world. You might wonder why does God not just dispense with this world like He did before with the flood?

He puts this world populated with His people in the midst of their sufferings, in the midst of all they go through, and they're very imperfect. We all are.

[ 27 : 14 ] But why does God leave His people sprinkled throughout this world? Why? Because God so loved the world. God loves the world, and so He makes sure that it has a presence of His people amongst them.

The blackness of the sky is punctuated with the twinkling of the stars. That light that shines out from God's people is intended to shine.

As Jesus said, nobody lights a lamp and sticks it under a basket. It's meant to shine out. It's meant to be there. That is part of why Christians are in the world.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand. And it gives light to all in the house.

That is part of how we show whose children we are and who our Father is. And when we do it, He is glorified.

[ 28 : 17 ] That's what we read there in verse 16. It's what Jesus is teaching. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Good works are not a dirty word, even in Protestant Christianity. Christianity. They are meant to be fulfilled. They are meant to be outworked. They are meant to shine.

And they are meant to glorify the Lord who is in heaven. This is part of how we show whose children we are. It is part of how we show who our Father is.

And when we do it, He is glorified. That is what good works are. And that is what they are for. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Amen. Let us pray. Gracious and beloved Lord, we ask thy blessing upon thine own word. We ask thy blessing upon all the works that thy children seek to do in honor and obedience to thy name.

[ 29 : 32 ] we know that we do them poorly. We know that our witness is not as it should be. But we pray that we may seek always to have thee as the center and soul of all that we do.

And that if thou be our motivation, Lord, then all that we undertake shall have something of the grace, something of the love and nature of Christ in it.

Because we know that none of what we do, we do by human nature. Human nature and the flesh just wants to rebel against the good works of God. It wants to do that which will please ourselves.

But when we do the good works, when we forgive and love our enemies, when we seek to do good to those in need, to share the riches of God's grace with those who have less, we know we're putting into practice what Jesus himself taught.

We know that we are glorifying our Father which is in heaven. Help us then to live this out. Help us to seek to do this and to be lights in this dark and needy world that we may shine for thee and that we may indeed show that we are the children of our Father who is in heaven.

[ 30 : 42 ] So bless to us this portion of thy word. Bless to us the Sermon on the Mount. Bless to us the teaching of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And forgive us for all our sin for his sake.

Amen. We close our worship this evening singing to God's praise in Psalm number 90. Psalm 90 in the traditional psalter. You'll find this on page 350 of the blue books.

Psalm 90 of which we'll sing the verses 14 to 17. That's the last four stanzas. O with thy tender mercies Lord us early satisfy so we rejoice shall all our days and still be glad in thee according as the days have been wherein we grief have had and years wherein we ill have seen so do thou make us glad O let thy work and power appear thy servants face before and show unto their children dear thy glory evermore and let the beauty of the Lord our God be us upon our hand works establish thou establish them each one verses 14 to 17 the last four stanzas from Psalm 90 to God's praise O with thy tender mercies Lord us early satisfy so we reach your choice shall all our days and still be glad in thee according as the days have been wherein we have had had and years where we have seen so do thou make us glad

O let thy work come come up here thy servant's face before thy servants face thy servants before thy dear glory ever more!

and let the beauty the Lord our be as upon our hand in words!

[ 33 : 49 ] our hand in words her establish them each one now may the grace of our Christ the God our holy and the communion of God the holy rest upon with you each one this night amen one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one one