

# Good Works

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[ 0 : 00 ] In Matthew chapter 5 we read at verse 16, Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

See your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. We began last Lord's Day morning looking at the next section of the different chapters of the confession of faith and the biblical basis behind it.

And we looked last Lord's Day morning at chapter 15, the repentance unto life. And this morning under the heading of chapter 16 in the confession of faith we look at the subject of good works or the biblical basis behind it.

We haven't got the right of course to take any document of men as any basis for biblical study. But it is itself based on the foundation of God's word.

And that is what we look at, the biblical basis and teaching behind the subject of good works. Now we see from our verse that we read in verse 16 that the purpose of good works is to glorify God.

[ 1 : 08 ] Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and not say, Hey, what a great guy, what a fantastic woman, look how holy and good they are. But rather glorify your Father which is in heaven.

So that is the purpose of good works, to glorify God. It is not necessarily the case that everything good that you do will or indeed should be seen in public.

Some of it will and should be unseen. If we turn to chapter 6 for example, that isn't about giving charity or doing alms. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them.

Otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. It doesn't say don't do the alms. It doesn't say don't give to charity in case people see you do it. But rather, therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.

Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But at verse 4, that thine alms may be in secret. Let not thy right hand, let thou know what thy right hand doeth.

[ 2 : 16 ] That thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth thee in secret himself shall award thee openly. Again at verse 6, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet. And when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.

And thy Father which seeth in secret shall award thee openly. Again at verse 19, lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Some of the things we are called upon to do, which are good things to do, good works to do, and prayer is a work, remember, as well as almsgiving and human charity and helping the poor and so on.

These are good works, but they're not all to be done publicly. But whilst we must take care that we attend to the unseen requirements of our faith, like prayer and reading God's word, and giving to the poor and to those in need, and remembering missionaries both in prayer and in giving and so on, in the same way as the athlete must be diligent in his or her training, or the student or the scholar in their studies and in their revision, which nobody sees.

[ 3 : 35 ] You know, nobody sees the hours that the student puts in in the library, or the hours and the horrible early mornings the athlete does at the track or whatever. All they see is the public event.

All they see is the final competitive sports event, or the exams and the results and so on. So they see the public thing, but they don't see the secret thing. But if the one is to match the other, we have to put in the one, the time in the one, so that the other will not be a source of shame and humiliation.

And likewise, if we're stating in public, this is who we are, this is what we're doing, our private relationship with the Lord ought to match it as well. We who seek to live as Christians must ensure that our outward and our inward lives are worthy of each other and are likewise honouring to the Lord.

And if that is the purpose of good works, to glorify the Lord, which Jesus says it is, that your life so shine before men, they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven, then it follows that we cannot, by definition, do that in a state of unbelief.

If it is your Father which is in heaven who is to be glorified when you do good works, then if God is not your Father in heaven, if you don't belong to him, if you're not trusting and believing in him, then it follows that we cannot, by definition, do any good works in a state of unbelief.

[ 5 : 05 ] We read in Hebrews 11, verse 6, Without faith it is impossible to please him, that is God. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Without faith it is impossible to please him. Likewise, Jesus said to his disciples in John chapter 15, verses 4 and 5, he said, Abide in me and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except that abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me. Can't bear any fruit except we be in Christ. I am the vine, ye are the branches, he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.

For without me ye can do nothing. Without me ye can do nothing. This means it is impossible to do any good works, capital G, capital W, in a state of unbelief.

A non-Christian cannot by definition do anything that would constitute good works 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 would be pleasing to the Lord.

[ 6 : 28 ] And the most important thing in the entire Bible that God commands men and women to do is to repent and to 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, is he?

Now this fact is important because so many people build their hopes for an afterlife on a sense of having had or lived a good life as they see it.

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

But the whole point is that without Christ nothing we do is by definition good in the sight of God for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God as we're told in Romans 3 verse 23.

[ 7 : 33 ] And our best efforts without Christ continue to be as St. Augustine put it we've heard of this before near splendid sins. Yes, we're doing our best and we're maybe doing things that outwardly seem good but in a state of unbelief they are near splendid sins.

Now the confession of faith often gets criticised for spelling out this fact. As it says in paragraph 7 of the 16th chapters we'll just read this as paragraph Works done by unregenerate men 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 this is some kind of catch 22 sort of damned if you do and damned if you don't kind of situation but all it is really saying is firstly that everything you do in a state of sin will be, must be and by definition is sinful.

Like if you're in a mud bath then whatever you do in that mud bath is going to be dirty. You can't trail out the mud bath in your nice clean kitchen and not expect to trail dirt all over the floor.

You turn on the taps you'll get dirt on the taps because you are filthy from head to toe. You've been in a mud bath. Therefore everything you touch, do and have in contact with is going to be made dirty by the fact that you are dirty.

[ 9 : 21 ] If you were underwater everything will be wet. You won't be able to get dry until you come out from the sea or the water and then you've got a chance to dry off in the sun or on dry clothes or whatever but as long as you stay underwater or even in the water everything you do and everything you touch and everything you underdick will be wet.

Therefore everything you do in a state of sin a state of unbelief will be by definition sinful. It is not that the things you do are so terrible or worse than anybody else.

It's not that you're such a criminal or violent person or whatever it's just that you're in a state of sin as long as you're not in a state of grace. And while you continue in a state of unbelief everything you do is by definition sinful.

Even the best works that we do splendid sins. And secondly that even if everything is sinful some sins are still worse than others.

So like when the confession says you have to do good things and help other people and have a benefit to others and to themselves and maybe things which God does command in his word yet they're doing them in a state of sin they're still sins and yet not doing these good or better things to do worse things that's even more displeasing to God.

[ 10 : 43 ] All that saying is that some sins are worse than others. And we all know that even in a state of sin and unbelief cruelty is still worse than kindness. and you know even if a guy is an unbeliever or who's an unbeliever you know adultery is still worse than faithfulness to their husband or wife and likewise you know renegeing on bills is still worse than paying them promptly.

Everything that you do things that you do they may be good things but in a state of sin they're still sins and yet not doing them is still worse. some sins are worse than others even for Christians.

There is a danger that just doing these basic things might puff them up with the idea that they must be good Christians because they they are faithful in their marriages and they pay their bills on time and they try to be kind and good but listen to what Jesus says about these things.

Verses the same chapter that we read but towards the end of the chapter verses 46 and 47 says if you love them which love you what reward have you done even the publicans the same and if you salute your brethren only what do ye more than others do not even the publicans so this is what Jesus is saying to his followers what do you do more than others it's not enough just to replicate the splendid sins of the world and say oh yeah but I'm doing them in a state of grace so they must be kind of good works there in that sense again similarly in Luke's account of the gospel making similar reference to these things we read in verses 32 to 36 in Luke chapter 6 if you love them which love you what thank of ye for sinners also love those that love them and if you do good to them which do good to you what thank of ye for sinners also do even the same and if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive what thank of ye for sinners also lend to sinners to receive as much again but love ye your enemies and do good and lend hoping for nothing again and your reward shall be great and ye shall be the children of the highest for ye is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil be ye therefore merciful as your father also is merciful if you will be children of your father then you've got to be you've got to go the extra mile you've got to love your enemies too and just in case anybody thinks well if we do all these things then God will be so impressed he'll have to let us into heaven because he'll owe us because our good will so outweigh our sins it'll just be amazing

Jesus says again Luke 17 verse 10 so likewise ye when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you say we are unprofitable servants we have done that which was our duty to do you can never do too much good nobody can out good God nobody can make God their debtor when we consider where we are upon this fallen earth and where God is in his pure heaven when we consider what Christ God the Son in all his perfect purity and humanity has done for us and the only way we can be saved is because of his sacrifice how can we ever out good God when we have done all that we are commanded we say we are unprofitable servants there's no reason why the Lord should want to save us but in his mercy he does how much less than we count as good works things which God has not himself commanded or required and we mentioned previously that good works are only those things which God has commanded in his work not things that men have just invented or just decided of themselves that this or that should be pleasing to the Lord in a former age the church encouraged pilgrimages and veneration of relics or observing of certain holy days or saints days none of which had any biblical warrants whatsoever and nowadays of course in another age other situations it's 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 work if we go back to the Old Testament we see in 1 Samuel chapter 15

[ 15 : 12 ] King Saul is given an instruction by God to destroy the Amalekites and completely wipe them out of man, woman and child cattle, beasts, the whole thing and after the battle and so on Samuel comes to him and we read that the people took of the spoil sheep and oxen the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God and Gilgal Saul says and Samuel said hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams and then a little later on of course Saul admits to Samuel a couple of verses later on that he in fact he feared the people and that's why he let them take of the spoil of the beasts and of the cattle and so on yes they may have done some sacrifices to the Lord but it wasn't exactly a sacrifice it wasn't really costing them because they'd stolen it from the Amalekites anyway

God did not intend that they should enrich themselves in the doing of this solemn executing duty instead they took for themselves the cattle and the beasts and so on yes they made one or two sacrifices but you know it's rather like you know sitting with gambling or lottery or something like that you got a big way and say oh it's okay because I put some of it in the church collection so that makes it okay what I did no this was disobedience by Saul and the Israelites God gave them an instruction and said it's okay we'll sacrifice some of it to the Lord and tell me no it's not okay God has more delight and obedience to his word than in any kind of supposed sacrifice and even even where the intention to honour the Lord is genuine and humble think of David when in 2 Samuel chapter 7 we read you know came to pass the king sat in his house the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies the king said to Nathan the prophet see now

I dwell in a house of cedar but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains and Nathan said to the king go do all that is in thine heart for the Lord is with thee and then we read in verse 7 the Lord says in all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel whom I commanded to feed my people Israel saying why build ye not me a house of cedar you know the Lord had welled in curtains in tabernacles which he was very specific about how the tabernacle was to be made he was very specific about all the details of it but he never once said to me hey build me a temple build me a beautiful temple it's as good as your palace you know did I ever once say why build ye me not a house of cedar and then later on the Lord says to David when thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers I will set up thy seed after thee which shall proceed under thy bowels and I will establish his kingdom he shall build me a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever so God would command

Solomon to do it but to David he said look I never asked him to do this I never told you to build me a temple it's good that it was in your heart it's good that you thought you wanted to do it but I didn't say David go and build me a temple and this is part of the thing we have to make sure that even that which we seek to do which is genuinely seeking to be honouring to the Lord is that which the Lord himself has required or commanded it's not just us deciding oh let's do this this will make us look good this will honour the Lord yeah it will make us look good 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 Matthew 15 we read verses 8 and 9 Jesus speaks to Pharisees he says this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth he's quoting the prophet Isaiah and honoureth me with their lips but their heart is far from me in vain do they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men teaching all their traditions all their own inventions all the things that they themselves have come up with as though this was coming from God this is where Jesus clashes with the Pharisees time and time again it's not in their desire to obey God's word in every little detail that was fine that was commendable but because they told themselves that in order to obey it they added all these little regulations and rules to sort of edge it about digging more and more moats and ditches round the centrality of God's word and Jesus all these extra things they're not from God they are your inventions they're not God's word himself teaching for 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 and what can we say that they are well Jesus has already given us some examples and we go back to Luke chapter 6 we read from verse 27 there

[ 20 : 40 ] I say unto you which hear love your enemies do goods to them which hate you now that is not something we can do by nature that takes grace bless them that curse you and pray for them which despitefully use you which of course Jesus himself did on the cross as well unto him that

smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also give to every man that asketh of thee and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again and as ye would that men should do to you do ye also to them likewise and we already read verse 35 and 36 love ye your enemies do good and lend hoping for nothing again and your reward shall be great and ye shall be the children of the highest for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil be ye therefore merciful as your father also is merciful judge not and ye shall not be judged condemn not and ye shall not be condemned forgive and ye shall be forgiven give and it shall be given unto you good measure pressed down and shaken together and running over shall be given to your bosom for with the same measure that ye meet with all it shall be measured to you again now two things here Jesus is saying one is you're going to do more than just others would do if you would do it just by human nature if you hate but when people hate you if you only lend when you expect to receive as much again then you can't call that good works it might be business but it's not good works you've got to be prepared to take a hit you've got to be prepared to lose a bit yourself in the giving out to others or the giving out to God for his service so you say

I can't do this for God I'd be poorer if I did that I would lose I would lose money or I would lose a day of my own time or my own holiday or whatever if I give that to God I can't do that if we're going to serve the Lord and do good works and do good to others we have to be prepared for the fact that it's going to cost it's going to cost us we're going to take a hit if we're going to be smitten on the other cheek again after the first one or lose our cloak as well as our cult then it's going to cost if we're going to lend the people and we have absolutely no idea when we'll ever get it back again it is going to cost if we're going to forgive our enemies where it's so much easier to be a grudge that it's going to cost but the second thing Jesus is saying there in Luke's account is that you're never going to be anyone's never going to be God's debtor because however much it costs you he is keeping a score of it he is seeing how generously you give and he will give back to you from his abundance good measure pressed down shaken together and we've all been in situations where you're filling a bag with something with sand or nuts or whatever it happens to be and it seems to be piled up and then you juggle it and shake it and smooth it down and it's nice and flat again you have loads more room so you put in more and you put in more this is what he says pressed and shaken together so there's as much packed in as possible that's what will be measured to you from the Lord if you are generous likewise to others this is part of the message of the gospel that because God is no man's debtor you will never be the poorer for living out the gospel in the first instance in the short term you might think you're going to be you're going to take a hit it's going to cost you money it's going to cost you goods it's going to cost you your pride because you're being smitten on both cheeks or you're losing bits of clothing or you're losing money as in or you're losing a day if you're giving it up to God instead of your holiday or work travel time or whatever you're losing or so it seems but you give that to the

Lord and or to those you are serving and God says he will make it back up for you more unabundedly nobody will ever be the poorer ultimately on God's account because they have given out for his cause God is no man's debtor and you'll never be the poorer for living out the gospel it will mean a measure of self-giving of sacrifice but that is part of Christian witness anyway we could be having a long lie on the Sabbath but if we are the Lord's then we're in his house in 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 again these two matchings the outward and the inward the outward witness the inward priority if indeed it is our priority we could just keep ourselves to ourselves or we could spout whatever gossip or slander we felt like but that isn't doing good is it we look at what James says in his letter chapter 1 read from verse 22 be ye doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves but if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in the glass for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was but whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work this man shall be blessed in his deed in what he does if any man among you seem to be religious and bridle of not his tongue but deceive with his own heart this man's religion is vain pure religion and undefiled before God and the father is this to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world going out doing the good visiting those in need helping those in distress we've got also this old fashioned AV kind of word communicate which is clearly intended to be

reaching out to those in affliction Hebrews 13 verse 16 to do good and to communicate forget not for with such sacrifices God is well pleased likewise again we just finished the Philippians not long ago and we saw in chapter 4 verse 14 there where Paul says notwithstanding he had well done that he did communicate with my affliction they got in touch they gave what help they could they didn't just look the other way they made the contact they made the gift they made the point of giving and the reminder that he was remembered and looked after and you of course you can only give out what you first have been given in the first place and so this is one reason why Paul writes to Timothy 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 17 charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded nor trust in uncertain riches but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy that they do good that they be rich in good works ready to distribute willing to communicate laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come that they may lay hold on eternal life and all these things are going there God's given us so much good he wants us to enjoy it he wants us to get the benefit of it but he wants us to share it with others communicate to do good and communicate do good works ready to distribute willing to communicate because then you're laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation 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 this word communicate this giving out this is what we read there this generosity with his own abundance is what the lord himself is like and he wants his children to be like him again going back to [ 29 : 04 ] Matthew 5 Jesus speaking in the sermon on the mount he said I say unto you love your enemies bless them that curse you do good to them that hate you pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven for he maketh his son to rise on the evil and the good and send his reign on the just and on the unjust because his children being like their father shows and proves to the world but they really are truly his now if for example every human father wants to think that these children are in some ways a wee bit like him in some ways whether it's in appearance or in character or whatever if say a father was European white and his wife produced a child that was either

Asian or black then leave aside any racial question he would know that that child is not his because it is not like him so clearly the father is somebody else now if we are meant to be reflecting the Lord because he is our father and we end up looking in appearance and behaviour and characteristic like somebody else in other words as Jesus says to the Pharisees you are of your father the devil if that is what we reflect then that doesn't glorify God does it that brings shame on the father just as if a human father is presented with a baby by his wife that is self evidently not is there is a measure of shame in it now we don't want to bring shame on our heavenly father we want to bring glory we want to bring joy to our heavenly father children being like their father shows and proves to the world that they are truly his and that pleases him it honors him it glorifies him and this is what Jesus says that he may be the children of your father which is in heaven be like him so if you are truly his you have so much cause for thankfulness so much reason to rejoice and to exercise your faith in practical merciful outworking so witness in your love for him showing that love for him by your public witness and worship and in your love for others this is how we show it because we recognize what he has done for us now we're not going to recognize what he has done for us if we don't believe in him as our father we'll just think well you know I worked for this I got my house and my furniture and my car and my that's why I have to earn the money for that that's me I did that I built this particular shed or whatever that's me and we don't apply your aptitude to these things the Lord gives you the employment and the means to buy the things you need for these things we don't give glory to the Lord and we think it's all of me that is to live effectively in a state of unbelief when we live in a state of faith we recognize all these things are from the Lord a man of faith looks around his home and says the Lord has provided this for me he looks at the shed he's built and he says the Lord enabled me to do that he looks at his family and he says I and the children whom the Lord has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel as Isaiah said he thanks the Lord for all that he has and because he knows it is from the Lord he feels rich and he is able to give and share with others and to show his love for others remember what Jesus said about the two greatest commandments of all made reference to them very recently in Mark chapter 12 said Jesus answered in the first of all the commandments is here O Israel the Lord our God is one Lord and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul with all thy mind and all thy strength this is the first commandment and the second greater than these and as we mentioned Matthew 22 verse 40 says of these two hang all the law and the prophets this light was meant to shine Christians are meant to

be doing good and it will inevitably be seen and known about you don't have to sound a trumpet in the synagogue or on the street like the hypocrites did in Jesus day it will become known without broadcasting without boasting it will out because if a house is dark like this world is dark and fallen if a house is dark but there is light in a room even if the door is shut you can see the light coming out under the crack under the door if there's a vent above the door you can see the light coming through there and if there's light outside but the house is dark and the curtains and the street light shines in then it will shine into the darkness and wherever it comes it lightens it a little and the more the door is open the light comes in this is part of why

[ 34 : 37 ] Christians are in the world it is part of what we are there to do Jesus said verse 14 of our chapter ye are the light of the world now it is true that he himself is the light of the world we can only just reflect that and like the moon at night you get a full moon at night wow it's bright the other night I woke up at three o'clock in the morning I but it is at night the light of the world and in the darkness of this world we are called upon to be as Jesus says the light of the world a city with a hill cannot be hid neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel but on a candlestick and it give light unto all that are in the house this is part of how we show of the witness and to be part of the showing whose children we are and who our father is and when we do it he is glorified that's what good works are and that is what we are for let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven let us pray