

7. Learning to Practice Good Works

In our last topic, we saw that each Christian is to be equipped to practice the law of liberty by being shown how to serve others. We saw that each Christian needs to be shown how to share the Gospel. Each Christian needs to be shown how to minister to other Christians. Each Christian needs to be shown how to teach and apply the Word of God. In our topic today, we will build on that foundation as we see that we are to show each of our physical and spiritual children how to practice good works.

James 2:14 says, “What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” Here, we see that James shows us that true faith will begin to change and transform our actions. We need to realize that some people will say they have faith, but it may be faith in their own works instead of faith in Christ. Works will never produce faith. In contrast, true faith will always produce works. That change is explained in Ephesians 2:8-10, where we read, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Our salvation is totally by grace, through faith, and that faith is a gift from God.

However, we see in verse 10 that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” At the moment we placed our faith in Christ, He immediately made us a new creation and gave us new desires. Our sin nature, that we had before we placed our faith in Christ, had a desire to sin. As a result, we frequently carried out that desire by committing sin. At the moment of salvation, we received a new nature that had new desires. Christ gave us new desires so that we have the desire to do good works. God prepared the good works, that He has for each one of us, before He even brought us to faith in Christ.

God made this preparation in advance so we could begin to walk in these good works from the moment of salvation. That is why our verse here, in James, tells us that there is no benefit in our lives if we do not begin to do these good works. We saw, in our last topic, that we want to equip our children to show others how to do good works. We also want to help our children learn how to help new Christians learn to yield their lives to the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit gives them the power to do those good works. Romans 6:16-18 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

Here, we see the key to yielding is obedience. If we obey the old sin nature, Romans 7:14-25 says that we will feel like we are experiencing death on this earth. If we obey the Lord from the heart, He will give us the power to practice righteousness. As a result of obeying the Lord from the heart, Romans 8:37-39 says, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers,

nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In the first part of Romans 8, the Holy Spirit is mentioned 19 times, because He is the One who gives us the power to obey and practice righteousness (do good works).

James gives us a practical illustration to understand what it means to do good works. James 2:15-17 says, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” As we look at these verses, we see that the Lord wants us to really open our eyes and see the needs around us. Verse 2 of this chapter talked about a poor man with filthy clothes. We can see that this brother needs some better clothes. If we know that a sister has no food, we know that she needs food. These are opportunities to do good works to a brother or sister because they need clothes or food. They do not need just words of concern and a promise to pray for them. If we have true faith, we will be looking for opportunities like this to do good works and the Lord will show us needs that we can meet. James says that we will show that we have true faith by both seeing and meeting needs in the lives of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some people might ask the question, what about the statement in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, which says, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” It is true that some people, who say they are Christians, might refuse to work. However, the answer is given in the following verses. 2 Thessalonians 3:12-15 says, “Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But *as for* you, brethren, do not grow weary *in* doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.” We teach them what the Word of God says and admonish the brother from the Word. At the same time, we keep looking for opportunities to do good in our own lives.

James 2:17-18 says, “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” Here, we see that we are not to separate faith from works. True faith will produce a genuine concern for others that will cause us to reach out and do good works. It is not a case that faith is against works. Instead, it is important to realize that true faith produces works. It is also important to realize that it is not faith or works. Instead, we want to help our children understand that true faith produces good works because of the fact that we have been given a new nature that desires to do good.

As a result, we want to show our children how to show their faith by doing those things that will be beneficial to others. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Here, we see that God has given every Christian at least one gift in order

to be effective in serving others. The purpose of that gift is not to benefit the person given the gift. Instead, the gifts that God gives us are to be used to serve others in such a way that the results will bring glory to God. This makes it possible for our children, and every Christian, to show their faith by their works.

James uses a very interesting illustration in these verses to show that true faith produces good works. James 2:19-20 go on to say, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” Some people who claim to be Christians say there is no need to do good works because they believe in God. As a result, James points out the fact that the demons also believe in God. Here, we see that they believe in the existence of God. Since they know that God exists, the demons are filled with fear, because they know that one day they will experience judgment.

Faith in the existence of God will never produce good works. The demons may be filled with fear of eternal judgment, but that does not produce good works because there is no faith. The goal of Satan will never change. Christ explained the goal of Satan very clearly when He said, in John 10:10, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” The demons cannot do good works that are beneficial to others, because they can only carry out the works that will fulfill the goal of Satan whose goal is to steal, to kill and to destroy. As a result, they believe in God but continue to do evil works.

The same thing is true for people who are not Christians. People who are not Christians have a sin nature that controls their lives, and so, they are slaves to sin. Christ said, in John 8:44, “You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.” Since all those who are not Christians are slaves to sin, they cannot do good works that are beneficial to others. The works of those who lack faith will be the works of this world and will have no eternal benefit.

God says that a person is foolish when that person thinks that he or she can have faith that does not produce good works. Since God says that we are created for good works when we are in Christ, a failure to desire to do works that are good in their character and beneficial in their effects means that such a person has not yet become a Christian, because that person does not have a new nature. That person may believe in the existence of God, and even fear eternal judgment just like the demons, but the complete lack of desire for good works shows that the person is not yet in Christ. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain to others that true faith will produce good works. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children, by your own example, that true faith produces good works that bring glory to God.