

# BaptistWay Bible Series for August 20: Salvation results in good works

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### Salvation results in good works

- Titus 3:1-9

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Christians readily quote Ephesians 2:8-9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” When they do, they are saying that salvation is not the result of anything they have done. They recognize salvation is a gift of God’s grace; and they are quick to point out that works play no role whatsoever. That is exactly correct.

Yet, denial of works can reach an extreme. Don’t misunderstand; works (especially of the Law) do not save. The New Testament is replete with references to salvation by grace through faith alone. But good works (often rendered “good deeds”) naturally follow salvation. The Apostle Paul points this out in the same letter of Ephesians in the very next verse: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

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This resonates with what James 2 says regarding works (“faith without works is dead,” vv. 17, 26). Some wrongly have believed Paul and James were on opposite sides of the “faith-works” discussion. Not so; both James and Paul recognize that works demonstrate faith. Paul just speaks in more positive terms than James, who was seeking to correct an opposite extreme.

In Titus 3:1-9, Paul exhorts Titus once again to lead the congregations toward exhibiting their Christian confession. In chapter 2, the focus was on life in the fellowship; in this chapter, the focus is on the impact believers are to leave on the world.

As Paul closes out his letter with these instructions to Titus, the themes of salvation by grace coupled with the need for good deeds again arise. Salvation is the result of God’s mercy and grace, not because of any righteousness on our part (vv. 4-7).

But salvation enables, even requires, those who have believed on God to be different. The difference is their good deeds. This is such an important issue that Paul mentions “good deeds” three times in this last chapter (vv. 1, 8 and 14). Furthermore, the importance of good deeds by Christians appears repeatedly in the pastoral letters.

The phrase “good deed(s)” occurs 28 times in the New Testament (using two different words for “good”—kalos and agathos). Many, but not all, of the occurrences either offer an example of one who did good deeds or spur Christians to exhibit good deeds. See Matthew 5:16; Acts 9:36; Romans 2:7;

13:3; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians, 1:10; Hebrews 10:24; and 1 Peter 2:12 (an echo of Matthew 5:16).

The exceptions are Matthew 26:10 and Mark 14:6, which describe Jesus' anointing by the woman as a good deed; John 10:32-33, which refer to Jesus' miraculous activity as good deeds; and Philippians 1:6, which describes God's act of salvation as a good work.

Of the 28 occurrences of the phrase "good deed(s)," the pastoral letters of Paul contain the remaining 14. For all the emphasis Paul places on sound teaching and correcting the false teachers, "good deeds" as the mark of a Christian easily can be overlooked. But this figure cautions against that.

Almost without exception, when Paul mentions good deeds in these letters, it is with a view to describing Christians in general. See 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10 (twice), 25; 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:21; 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14.

However, in 1 Timothy 3:1, the desire to be a bishop is described as "good work," and in Titus 1:16, the corrupt are described as literally "worthless of every good deed."

Paul tells Titus to remind Christians on Crete how to relate to officials in governmental authority, how to speak to others, and how to exhibit a proper attitude toward all people (vv. 1-2). The reason for the need of this new way of acting is clear. Before being saved, all believers (Paul says "we," including himself) lived foolishly, disobediently, in deceptions, as slaves to sin and in enmity with others.

But all that changed when God showed us his kindness and love (his love for people in general), and saved us. He even shows the whole Trinity is involved. God is our Savior; the Holy Spirit brings about renewal; Jesus Christ (also called our Savior) generously poured out the Holy Spirit on us. But with salvation, a change in action follows.

Because of our salvation experience, Paul tells Titus, stress should be placed on “good deeds” (v. 8). Titus 3:1 focuses on the readiness to do good deeds; verse 8 emphasizes careful attention be paid to engage in good deeds; and verse 14 highlights the need for believers to learn to engage in good deeds. He says good deeds are “excellent (literally, “good”) and profitable.”

With all the focus on “good works” above, is it enough to say that these alone constitute Christianity? Certainly not. Possessing sound theology is extremely important for Christians. The pastoral letters repeatedly make that clear. But in Titus 3:9, Paul once again warns Titus (as he did Timothy) against getting involved in trivial matters. Controversies of the kind Paul describes therein are “unprofitable and useless.” He even instructs Titus on a procedure for dispatching a divisive person (v. 10). But Titus is to be an example of good works (2:7) and he is to guide the Cretan Christians to good works.

Good works do not result in salvation; but salvation results in good works.

### **Discussion questions**

- In the Christian life how do we strike a balance between right belief and “good deeds?”
- What are the results of good deeds without right belief and vice versa?
- Look up the references to “good deeds” above. Who exhibited them, how important are they and what is their potential result?



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