

# Good Works - The Vital Constituent For Evangelistic Success

*Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work ... to all men. ... these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. ... let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, **that they may not be unfruitful.***

**Titus 3:1-2, 8, 14**

The church has lost something important. It has lost something which has always formed a vital part of its testimony throughout history. It has lost something which is right at the centre of God's purpose for his children and has forgotten that this ministry is the secret to success in evangelism. Since contemporary evangelistic activity is so shallow the church is in decline. This is partly due to the corruption of the Gospel message, but it is also due to the methods used in the service of Gospel preaching.

This article will not concentrate upon the content of the message preached (as I have done that extensively in other places). Here I want to focus upon the missing heart of evangelistic activity - good works.

Today, churches are using every possible method to gather in converts. Sadly, this is often motivated by a desire to build up numbers as nearly all churches are in a steep decline and have been for many years. Even previously successful churches are now seeing a slump in numbers attending services regularly. Some of the methods used have gained massive publicity; certain courses have attracted thousands of pounds of advertising and secured places in the media. Yet none of these methods have proved effective. They never have been and never will be because they are not God's plan for witnessing.

The most popular current course leaders do not advertise that an independent report in 2001 revealed that more than half the churches using this course saw their numbers fall and that only about a quarter saw any increase in numbers at all, even after three years of use. Furthermore, the published testimonies of those 'converted' by this course lead to grave doubts that some (many?) of the 'converts' have not really met with the Lord Jesus.

Some churches have changed their whole ethos of gathering, exchanging the focus upon worshipping God together for a style which makes the lost feel more comfortable and entertained. Such a change comes close to blasphemy, it certainly is unbiblical as it puts the priority upon man instead of God. Again, the promoters of this method do not advertise recent independent evaluations in America where the idea started. It seems that genuine commitment to the church and the Gospel is severely weakened, numbers fluctuate wildly, the real core of godly folk is small and many people have come through years of 'ministry', even rising to leadership levels, only for those over them to suddenly realise that such were never genuinely converted.

It seems that the modern church will try anything, no matter how wacky, rather than simply rely upon what God tells us to do in his word.

## What Does God Tell Us To Do?

### **Good works to all men - a command**

We are commanded by God to do good to all men at all times, so there is no escaping that this should be a significant feature of our normal activities.

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10)*

Jesus emphasised the need for us to love our neighbour as ourselves and even gave us word pictures to underline it (the parable of the Good Samaritan). There is no doubt that being a Christian includes the responsibility to do good to others around us. Even without other motivations, we must do good works because it is God's will that we do good to all.

### **The Christian's testimony - a basic personal requirement**

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matt 5:16)*

Christians are expected to shine out from the world like stars in the night (Phil 2:15). We manifest the character of God by what we do, just as we testify to the truth of God by what we say. Our light is meant to shine before men; the light shines as we perform good works. Our first motivation to do this is so that God is glorified. Whether we see any results in souls or not, we do it to honour God. God loves his people to perform good. Righteousness must be seen not just talked about. It is as we do good that we express God to those around us.

So it is of first importance that believers live righteous lives; without this there is no Christian testimony of any kind. The concept of a Christian living exactly the same as the secular individual is anathema; we must stand out from the world - indeed the world must be crucified to us (Gal 6:14). If we watch the same movies and TV, listen to the same pop songs, wear the same fashions, love the same idols, submit to common hedonistic ideals, strive for the same middle class lifestyles, fail to stand up for justice, fail to suffer for the Gospel - then we have failed to emit any kind of light in a dark world.

Those who have received righteousness in Christ for justification, must also manifest righteousness in their daily lives as a confession of Christ. Jesus expressed 'many good works' to prove he was sent by the Father (Jn 10:32). In like manner, we must reveal the good works God has chosen us for (Eph 2:10). We were not saved in a vacuum; we are not God's museum pieces waiting to be scooped up into heaven. We are called by God to perform good works to prove our faith is genuine and to witness that God is active in the world, working to a plan and commanding repentance. In fact, God wants us to be 'zealous for good works' (Titus 2:14).

Christians, and especially those who have comfortable lifestyles (which is most western believers) are commanded by Paul to not simply do good, but to be *rich* in good works -willing to give to others less fortunate. What is sacrificed here on earth will be rewarded in eternity.

*Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Tim 6:18-19)*

Good works are not a one-off occasional venture but we must 'maintain good works' (Titus 3:8). Our desire to do good to others must be consistent and continual. This is why leaders are to be a 'pattern of good works' (Titus 2:7), be a model of righteous, sacrificial living. Paul was a prime example of this, often refusing to accept justifiable financial support so as not to be a

burden to struggling congregations. The character of leaders is one of the most effective ways of establishing correct lifestyle examples. Leaders must ensure that they do not fail in this.

### **The church's testimony - a basic corporate requirement**

The writer to the Hebrews suggests that we should almost compete with one another is striving to do good, certainly we should stir one another up to good works (Heb 10:24). When we fellowship, we should be seeking to encourage one another to do more good to others, not just to folk within the assembly. Outsiders are not fools. They make value judgments about churches based upon what they see believers do. When they see genuine goodness arising out of a community they can celebrate what they see of God being expressed in righteous deeds:

*... having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation (2 Pt 2:12)*

Good works form a stable, trusted basis for establishing a church's credentials to the world. When certain churches are known to focus upon money, buildings, authority or possessing an inward-looking mentality, they have no credence outside. When they eventually reach out with the Gospel, no matter how attractive the meeting or how extravagant the worship or how charismatic the preacher - people just do not trust them.

Good deeds are first necessary so that churches fulfil their task to manifest God. We do good to others because God has been good to us and wants us to reflect his benevolence. We must 'do good to all men'. But having said that, good works form a platform for effective Gospel preaching. Where there is a consistent basis of reaching out to help the community in practical ways, there is a readiness in people to listen. Folk will automatically trust those who have given food hampers to the poor, visited the sick, helped handicapped and elderly people with housework and gardening or decorated a sick person's lounge.

The Gospel does not flourish in a vacuum, it feeds upon the godly lifestyle of its ministers and flourishes upon the righteous deeds of the saints. Good works cause us all to shine, and what the world needs today is more light as it plunges into greater darkness than ever before.

The words of the Gospel contain their own light, but we need people to listen to the message we preach or read the material we give them. Godless people do not usually bother doing either, they are in darkness and see no need to interest themselves in our message. What is necessary is that we shine some light into their lives and generate an interest in what we have to say. Good works do that - they create enough light for people to give some consideration to the Gospel. They make a foundational platform for us to start some kind of building in their lives.

## **The Failure Of Yesterday, The Need Of Today**

### **Why are good works out of favour?**

The church always had a historical testimony of reaching out to the poor with charitable efforts. All branches of the church did this, some even became institutions in themselves. When the church failed as a unit, individuals succeeded time after time. Dr Barnardo established orphanages in London, as did George Muller in Bristol. Many godly men and women established schools and universities leading to the educational system we now enjoy in Britain. It was Christians who set up the first hospitals, brought about the end of slavery, gained just rights for child workers and established prison reforms. Time after time in history it

was Christians whose good works changed society - simply because they sought to do good to all men in honour of their God.

After the establishment of the welfare system in the mid 20th century, which itself followed many reforms giving greater health and education to the population, the opportunities for significant charitable works lessened. They did not cease, they were less obvious. Local churches had no need to help local poor children forced to work up Victorian chimneys since the benefit system ensured that there should be no poor children. (I realise that many kids are officially below the poverty level today, but the point still holds. If the system is working, there should be no suffering children.)

As the need for obvious outside charitable works reduced from the 1950's onwards, the church became much more inward looking. With the advent of the Charismatic Renewal in institutional churches and the Charismatic Movement generally, Christians became much more focused on their desires and needs within church. One proof of this is the rapid decline in the numbers of missionary workers since 1965. By the millennium, some Charismatic churches had been in existence for 20 or 30 years and had done no significant charitable works of any kind to those outside. In this same period it lamented its lack of converts and desperately clung to any novel idea which suggested that people might be reached through it. They all failed and the churches declined. Should we be surprised?

People today want someone else to do their work for them. The consumer society encourages them to feel this way. We want coffee within one minute of boiling a kettle. We want the washing to be done while we go shopping. We want the meal to be microwaved while we watch television. All these things used to take a long time. Washing alone would take up a housewife's whole day at least once a week fifty years ago, a vacuum cleaners were nowhere to be seen. The more we have instant gratification and relaxation time, the more we develop an attitude of finding some way to avoid struggle. Christians have become like this in mission. If we want people saved then we: get a full-time youth leader, import a famous evangelist, get on board with the latest methodology, work with an ecumenical crusade and so on.

The hard truth and the Biblical method is that:

- We work hard to share our material blessings and seek to do good to others. This costs us all in time and money.
- We work hard to prepare ourselves in sharing the Gospel to others and make the most of every opportunity for one-to-one witnessing. This costs us in time to study God's word and to ensure we can use scripture effectively in evangelism. It costs us socially in risking embarrassment and loss of friends due to our readiness to witness.

This is the Biblical, time-honoured method of seeing people saved. It is the method commanded by God. It is we who must go out to every nation and make disciples (Matt 28:19); it is us who must make the most of every opportunity (Col 4:5). We cannot delegate this task to others or to some good idea.