

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What God's Word teaches about

GOOD WORKS

Gordon Lyons

KJV Edition

Important Notice

The series *Bible Truths Explained*
may be downloaded, printed and used free of charge
by individuals, groups, and institutions

However, none of these Doctrinal Notes
may be offered for sale or for commercial publication

Bible Truths Explained: Good Works
Revised: 1987, 2000, 2005
First published: 2005
1-word.com web site publication

Copyright Notices

Bible Truths Explained

Good Works

Copyright © 2005 Gordon Lyons
All Rights Reserved

Limited extracts from this work may be quoted elsewhere, on condition that the name and author of the original work is acknowledged in a format similar to the following:

'Quoted from
Bible Truths Explained: Good Works
Copyright © 2005, Gordon Lyons
Used by permission'

Scripture quotations taken from
The HOLY BIBLE
KING JAMES VERSION
unless otherwise stated

Additional Scripture quotations taken from
The HOLY BIBLE
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society
Used by permission

Principal Works Consulted

- Barnes, Alfred *Notes on The Bible*, Electronic edition (public domain)
- Bauer, Walter /
revised and edited by
Danker, Frederick William *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Third Edition BDAG) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Berkhof, Louis *Systematic Theology*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1939, 1941 reprint.
- Boettner, Loraine *Roman Catholicism*, Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962
- Calvin, John *Institutes*: [Beveridge Translation, 1800, Battles Translation Vols. 1-4, 1960] Rio, WI, USA: Ages Software, Inc., The John Calvin Collection, 2000, Electronic edition (CD).
- Clarke, Adam *Commentary on the New Testament*: Electronic edition (public domain)
- Dabney, R. L. *Systematic Theology*, [St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Company of St. Louis, 1871, second ed. 1878] Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust edition, 1985.
- Gill, John *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, Electronic edition (public domain)
- Hodge, Charles *Systematic Theology*, Vols. 1-3; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977 reprint.
- Hodge, Charles *Princeton Sermons*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1879, 1979 reprint.
- Jamieson, Fausset & Brown *Commentary on The Whole Bible* (Revised edition, 1961): Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.
- Murray, John *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955.
- Poole, Matthew *A Commentary on The Holy Bible* Vols. 1-3 (1685-1700): Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1878, 2000 reprint.
- Robertson, A.T. *Robertson's Word Pictures*, Electronic edition (public domain)
- Ryle, J. C. *Holiness*: Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1879, 1999 reprint.
- Ryle, J. C. *Practical Religion*: Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1939, 1941 reprint.
- Vincent *Vincent's Word Studies*, Electronic edition (public domain)
- Westminster Confession of Faith*, Inverness: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1976 reprint.

Special Acknowledgement

I must acknowledge a genuine debt of gratitude to the work of Dr. Charles Hodge. The writings of this theologian from a previous generation have helped considerably in preparing this work. On a number of occasions—as will be seen when reading these studies—I have cited or alluded to Dr. Hodge's remarks in his three-volume *Systematic Theology*. These references have been acknowledged in the footnotes to the study text.

Good Works

Contents

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED	i
GOOD WORKS	i
Contents	vii
Part 1	1
Synopsis: Good Works	1
Note 1	1
Justification is Not by Works	1
Scripture References	1
Note 2	2
No-one is Able to Keep God's Law Perfectly	2
Scripture References	2
Note 3	2
When Good Works are Unacceptable	2
Scripture References	3
Note 4	3
God Requires Good Works	3
Scripture References	3
Note 5	4
Good Works that Honour and Glorify God	4
Scripture References	4
Related Bible Truths	5
Part 2	7
Doctrine of Good Works	7
Faith and Works	7
Different Meanings of the Term 'Good Works'	7
Scripture References	7
Scripture References	8
Scripture References	9

Part 3.....	11
Not All Good Works are Acceptable to God _____	11
When Good Works are Acceptable to God _____	11
Good Works Cannot Merit Salvation _____	11
Good Works Have a Valid Place _____	12
Saved Unto Good Works _____	12
Part 4.....	15
Example of Christ _____	15
Works Must be Pleasing to God _____	15
Part 5.....	19
What Kind of Works are Good Works? _____	19
Love Your Neighbour As Yourself _____	19
Love to Our Neighbour _____	19
Practical Examples _____	19
A Pure, Sincere and Humble Heart _____	20
What God Requires _____	20
Part 6.....	23
Worship Without Works is an Abomination _____	23
Hypocritical Service is an Abomination _____	24
'In These I Delight' _____	25
Part 7.....	27
Works of Spiritual Instruction _____	27
The Work of Preaching and Teaching _____	27
Importance of Teaching Sound Doctrine _____	27
Inadequate Knowledge Leads to Errors of Faith and Practice _____	27
Proclaiming the Whole Will of God _____	27
Each Man's Work Will be Judged _____	28
Judgment by Fire _____	28

Part 1

Synopsis: Good Works

Good works, righteous acts, or deeds of merit cannot in any respect contribute toward a sinner's justification, nor can they assist in keeping a believer's salvation secure. Salvation is entirely of God's grace, and not by a person's works of righteousness. Regarding seeking justification by one's own efforts, good works can never merit God's favour. Nevertheless, good works can and do find God's favour when they issue from a heart renewed by God's unmerited grace. Good works resulting from a renewed heart are the fruits or evidence of a regenerated and sanctified life. The believer has been saved by grace: but God has saved him unto holiness of life and unto good works. God prepared these works beforehand that the believer should practise them or walk in them. All such good works as issue from love to God, and from justice, mercy and compassion toward one's neighbour, are commanded by God and are commendable in his sight. While adding nothing to the believer's salvation or eternal security, it is works of this nature that contribute toward the believer's reward in heaven.

Note 1

Justification is Not by Works

Very many people believe mistakenly that they can earn God's favour by their 'upright' lives or by their good deeds. They believe further that—by a sincere performance of these good deeds—they can merit God's approval and thus contribute toward their justification and redemption. These people do not submit to the righteousness that comes from God through faith. Rather, they seek to establish their own righteousness by works. Thus, although often very sincere in their beliefs and practices, these people try to make their salvation depend on the good things that they are able to achieve or perform in their lives. However, no matter how great the sacrifices they make, and no matter how many good deeds they perform, they cannot be justified by works of the law. For by works of the law shall no one be justified. (Rom. 9:31-32; 10:2-4; Gal. 2:16,21)

Scripture References

Romans 9:31-33

⁽³¹⁾ But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. ⁽³²⁾ Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

⁽³³⁾ As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and rock of offense: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. {*Isaiah 8:14-15; 28:16*}

Romans 10:2-4

⁽²⁾ For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. ⁽³⁾ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. ⁽⁴⁾ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Galatians 2:15-16

⁽¹⁵⁾ *We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,* ⁽¹⁶⁾ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Galatians 2:21

⁽²¹⁾ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Note 2

No-one is Able to Keep God's Law Perfectly

Frequently, people ask why good works cannot effect a person's justification—especially if these good works proceed from a sincere heart. The answer is this: A person cannot be justified by his good works because—in order to be justified by works of the law—one must keep the law of God perfectly in thought, word, deed, attitude and inclination. Furthermore, that person must do so from the very beginning of his life to the very end—*without failing in even one point*. Since no one is capable of keeping God's law perfectly, no one can be justified by his righteous deeds or works of righteousness. In addition, since the law of God already *condemns* everyone as sinners, the same law cannot also *justify* them as righteous. (Matt. 5:20; Gal. 3:10-12; Jas. 2:10)

Scripture References

Matthew 5:20

⁽²⁰⁾ For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Galatians 3:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. {*Deut. 27:26; Jer. 11:3*}

⁽¹¹⁾ But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, *it is evident*: for, The just shall live by faith. {*Hab. 2:4*}

⁽¹²⁾ And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. {*Lev. 18:5; Neh. 9:29*} (See Gal. 3:13-14)

James 2:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all. (See vv.8-13; cf. Matt. 5:19)

Note 3

When Good Works are Unacceptable

There is, however, another reason why good works cannot effect a person's justification. When performed by an unregenerate person, good works—or works of righteousness—are 'works of the flesh'; i.e. they emanate from a nature that is utterly depraved or wholly corrupted by sin. No matter how sincere a person's motives may be, their 'good deeds' issue from a heart that is at enmity with God by

'wicked works'. Essentially, this means that these works come from a heart and life that is still being controlled by the attitudes and practices of the unregenerate and sinful nature. God will not accept a person's good works while that person remains at enmity with him and devoid of the Spirit of grace and of holiness. Regarding salvation, therefore, a person's good works or righteous acts are to no avail. Justification must come by God's sovereign grace—apart from deeds of the law. (Rom. 8:5-8; Eph. 2:3; Col. 1:21)

Scripture References

Romans 8:5-8

⁽⁵⁾ For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. ⁽⁶⁾ For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. ⁽⁷⁾ Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. ⁽⁸⁾ So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (See vv.1-13)

Ephesians 2:3

⁽³⁾ Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (See vv.1-9)

Colossians 1:21-22

⁽²¹⁾ And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled ⁽²²⁾ In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight: (See v.23)

Note 4

God Requires Good Works

While good works can neither save a sinner, nor keep a redeemed child of God secure in his salvation, God nevertheless requires a person to practise them. In the case of an unregenerate person (an unbeliever) it is more blameworthy if he should neglect to do good, than if he should perform good deeds. At the Last Judgment, the degree of his punishment will be according to his deeds. In the case of a believer, God's Holy Spirit has recreated him unto newness of life. Although saved and kept solely and wholly by the grace of God, the believer must prove or demonstrate the reality of his regeneration and justification by works that are well pleasing to God, and which God has prepared for him from eternity. These good works are the expression of a true and living faith, and the fruit of a sanctified life. (Matt. 25:41-46; Luke 12:47-48; Eph. 2:10)

Scripture References

Matthew 25:41-46

⁽⁴¹⁾ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁽⁴²⁾ For I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: ⁽⁴³⁾ I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (See vv.31-40)

Luke 12:47-48

⁽⁴⁷⁾ And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. ⁽⁴⁸⁾ But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (See vv.35-46)

Ephesians 2:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Note 5

Good Works that Honour and Glorify God

The kinds of good works that are pleasing to God are those that honour his name by fulfilling the teaching of his Word—the Bible. Works or spiritual fruit such as justice, mercy, equity, love, and compassion—together with all the kind deeds or righteous acts that arise from these attributes of mind—are properly known as good works. A believer should perform such works to the glory of God. Again, these works should be actively and practically of value to other people. This concern for the honour of God's name, and for the welfare or our neighbour, becomes evident by the cheerful and willing performance of good works or acts of mercy. This is the outcome of a truly renewed and sanctified life, and the expression of heartfelt praise, gratitude and adoration to God for the great salvation that he has so freely and graciously bestowed upon us. (Micah 6:8; Luke 10:29-37; Jas. 2:14-17,26)

Scripture References

Micah 6:8

⁽⁸⁾ He hath showed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (See vv.6-7)

Luke 10:29-37

⁽²⁹⁾ But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

⁽³⁰⁾ And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. ⁽³¹⁾ And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ⁽³²⁾ And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side. ⁽³³⁾ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*, ⁽³⁴⁾ And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ⁽³⁵⁾ And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said

unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

⁽³⁶⁾ Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

⁽³⁷⁾ And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (See vv.25-28)

James 2:14-17

⁽¹⁴⁾ What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ⁽¹⁵⁾ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ⁽¹⁶⁾ And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? ⁽¹⁷⁾ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. (See vv.18-25)

James 2:26

⁽²⁶⁾ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Related Bible Truths

Closely related to the doctrine of good works are the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and the last or final judgment. Only those good works that proceed from a life justified by God's grace, and that are the fruit of a sanctified life, are approved of, and accepted by God. At the Final Judgment, every believer will give an account to God of the things done while in this body. Then, the Lord will judge each believer according to his deeds. Either he will receive his reward (in proportion to his works), or he will forfeit his reward. He will not, however, forfeit his salvation.¹

¹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Justification; Sanctification; The Second Coming*, by the same author.

Part 2

Doctrine of Good Works

Faith and Works

There is no contradiction between the justification by faith spoken of by Paul and the justification by works spoken of by James. When speaking of justification by faith, Paul is referring to that justification by which God pronounces a repentant and believing sinner righteous in his sight. However, when James speaks of justification, he is speaking of that justification by which a converted person subsequently proves the validity of his faith by his day-to-day conduct or manner of life. The same word (justification) is being used in two distinct senses; or for two different—but related—purposes.²

Different Meanings of the Term ‘Good Works’

We may understand the term *good works* in different senses. In theology, the three most important of these senses are as follows:³

1. Firstly, works may be called good *when, as to the nature of them*, they are what the law of God prescribes and requires. Such works may be performed by the unregenerate (the unsaved)—although not out of any conscious regard for God’s law. Although lacking the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, no man is so wicked, or so far removed from the general influences of God’s law, that he does not at some time perform good works. The Scriptures tell us that the Gentiles (the unconverted world of mankind) do by nature the things contained in the law; i.e. they perform acts of justice, mercy and charity. They may go to great lengths to help those in need; they may contribute generously to many good and worthwhile causes; they may even give their own lives—if necessary—to protect someone they love from danger. In and of themselves, all these acts are good and commendable. As to their nature, they are what the law of God requires. This kind of good works is termed *civil goodness*, since their sphere is confined to the social relations of men. Social works or acts of humanity, however, cannot commend a person to God, if these works proceed from an unregenerate and unsanctified heart and life. (Matt. 7:9-11; Rom. 2:14-15; 4:2; 5:7; Eph. 2:9)

Scripture References

Matthew 7:9-11

- ⁽⁹⁾ Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? ⁽¹⁰⁾ Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? ⁽¹¹⁾ If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (See vv.7-8)

Romans 2:14-15

² See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Justification*, under *Justification by Faith and Works*, by the same author.

³ Based on C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, [Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1977 reprint], p.232 (emphasis added).

⁽¹⁴⁾ For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: ⁽¹⁵⁾ Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) (See vv.11-16)

Romans 4:2

⁽²⁾ For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. (See vv.1-5)

Romans 5:7

⁽⁷⁾ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. (See vv.6-8)

Ephesians 2:9

⁽⁹⁾ Not of works, lest any man should boast. (See vv.8,10)

2. Secondly, works may be called good *when*, as to the nature of them, and *as to the design or motive of the person performing them*, they are what the law of God requires. In other words, a work is good when there is nothing either in the person or the act that the law condemns. In this sense, not even the works of the holiest of God's people are good. Since the Fall, no-one is ever—in this life—in such an inward state that he can stand before God and be accepted on the ground of what he is, or what he does. All our righteousnesses—all our best intentions and endeavours—are as filthy rags in the sight of the most holy God. (Eccl. 7:20; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10,20; Phil. 3:4-9)

Scripture References

Ecclesiastes 7:20

⁽²⁰⁾ For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Cf. 1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9)

Isaiah 64:6

⁽⁶⁾ But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (See vv.1-9; cf. Isa. 1:4-6)

Romans 3:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: (See vv.9-18; cf. Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3)

Romans 3:20

⁽²⁰⁾ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. (See vv.19,21)

Philippians 3:3-6

⁽³⁾ For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. ⁽⁴⁾ Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath

whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: ⁽⁵⁾ Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; ⁽⁶⁾ Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. (See vv.1-2)

Philippians 3:7-9

⁽⁷⁾ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁽⁸⁾ Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, ⁽⁹⁾ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (See vv.10-14)

3. Thirdly, works may be called good *when they are the fruit of a regenerated and sanctified life*. Although no works, even of the true people of God, are absolutely perfect; nevertheless, these inward exercises and outward acts that are the fruit of the Spirit are properly designated 'good', and are so called in Scripture. For instance, the Scriptures tell us that Tabitha (or Dorcas) *was always doing good*. Again, God's Word tells us that believers are created in Christ Jesus *to do good works*. They tell us that, through God's Word, the man of God becomes thoroughly equipped *for every good work*. The Scriptures also tell us that Christ gave himself for us to purify for himself a people that are his very own, *eager to do what is good*. (Acts 9:36; Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:17; Titus 2:14)

Scripture References

Acts 9:36

⁽³⁶⁾ Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did. (See vv.32-43)

Ephesians 2:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (See vv.8-9)

2 Timothy 3:17

⁽¹⁷⁾ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (See v.16)

Titus 2:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (See vv.11-15)

Part 3

Not All Good Works are Acceptable to God

As has been demonstrated on the preceding pages, both a regenerate person and an unregenerate person may perform good works. Clearly, however, good works performed by unregenerate men and women are not acceptable to God. This is because they originate from a heart and life that is not right with God. Although he may perform numerous good and commendable works, the unregenerate person remains alienated from God by those wicked works that proceed from his fallen, sinful nature. Those who are 'in the flesh'—i.e. those who live and act according to their unrenewed and sinful nature—cannot please God. (Rom. 8:6-8; Col. 1:21) We will discuss this subject more fully below.⁴

When Good Works are Acceptable to God

By God's undeserved grace, a sinner is regenerated and justified. Following the sinner's justification, God's Spirit works within that person encouraging him to perform those things that are pleasing in God's sight, and honouring to his holy name. Although far from perfect, the works of the children of God are truly and properly good, because:⁵

1. As to their **nature**, or as to the nature of the thing done, they are works which are commanded by God.
2. As to the **motive**, they are the fruits, not merely of right moral feelings, but of right religious feeling: i.e., of love toward God.
3. As to the **purpose**, they are performed with the intention of complying with God's will; of honouring Christ as our Lord and Master, and of promoting the interests of his kingdom.

Good Works Cannot Merit Salvation

As has been intimated already, a lifetime of good works can never save a man's soul, or commend him to God. The man who seeks salvation and justification through obedience to the law, must keep the law of God perfectly in every detail. He must do this from the very beginning of his life, to the very end. Clearly, this is impossibility. Since the Fall, mankind lacks all ability to fulfil the law of God to perfection. Furthermore, all mankind has inherited original sin. On this ground alone, all humanity stands condemned. The fulfilment of the law would be to no avail, unless a person could make full atonement for sin (original sin and actual or personal sin). Had this been possible, the substitutionary and atoning death of Christ would have been superfluous. Thus, God's Word says:

Galatians 2:21

⁽²¹⁾ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

⁴ See also on *Bible Truths Explained: Sin*, under *Protestant Doctrine of Original Sin*, by the same author.

⁵ C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 [Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1977 reprint], p.237 (emphasis added).

Galatians 3:21-22

⁽²¹⁾ *Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.* ⁽²²⁾ *But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. (See vv.19-24)*

No one, therefore, can achieve his justification by what he is, or by what he does (unless that person is totally without sin, as is the Lord Jesus Christ). Concerning fallen mankind, however, good works, acts of righteousness, professed or genuine and sincere obedience to the moral law, cannot be the means whereby any person is justified and reconciled to God. In his fallen state, mankind is utterly unable to merit God's favour. The only thing he merits—and merits justly—is God's righteous wrath against his sin.⁶

Good Works Have a Valid Place

Good works cannot save a person; nor, while that person remains in his unregenerate state, can good works commend him to God. Yet, for the redeemed of the Lord, good works have a valid and necessary place. They count toward a believer's reward in heaven (and, often, unexpected blessings on earth too). If, then, a person's good works are to receive God's commendation, and if they are to prove acceptable in his sight, they must proceed from a regenerated and sanctified heart. They ought also to come from a pure and humble state of mind. Again, they must accord with God's purposes for our lives.

Saved Unto Good Works

By his grace and mercy, God has saved us, through faith. He has saved us, however, unto good works. We are the new creation of God in Christ Jesus. We are his workmanship. God set his love upon us from before the creation of the world and determined that we should belong to him. Following on from this, the Lord has determined that we should honour him by carrying out those works that he has foreordained for us. Thus, the Scripture says:

Ephesians 2:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (See vv.8-9)*

Titus 2:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

Faith that does not result in holiness of life and good works is not saving faith. If we say that we believe, yet do not practise those works that honour God—and to which God has called his people—we are denying the faith that we claim to possess. James illustrates this point by saying:

James 2:14-17

⁽¹⁴⁾ *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ⁽¹⁵⁾ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ⁽¹⁶⁾ And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? ⁽¹⁷⁾ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. (See vv.18-25)*

⁶ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Free Will*, under *Free Will and Ability*. See also *Bible Truths Explained: The Fall of Man; Sin*, by the same author.

James 2:26

⁽²⁶⁾ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Part 4

Example of Christ

The Son of God came into the world with the express purpose of seeking and saving that which was lost. To this end, he died on the cross for the sins of his people. Even so, while his paramount concern was for the glory of God in redeeming the lost, the Lord Jesus never neglected to minister to a person's physical and material needs. During his public ministry, the Lord sought at every opportunity to do good to those around him. Concerning these things, the apostle Peter says:

Acts 10:38

⁽³⁸⁾ How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. (See vv.34-43)

Those who were sick, he healed. Those who were possessed by evil spirits, he delivered. Those who were dead, he raised. To those who were blind, he restored sight. To those who were deaf and dumb, he restored hearing and speech. Thus, it is written:

Matthew 4:23-24

⁽²³⁾ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. ⁽²⁴⁾ And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. (See v.25)

Our Lord's whole life was an example of good works. He performed works that were right and acceptable in the sight of God. He did them—not for the praise and acclamation of men—but to honour and glorify God's majestic and holy name. So, too, the believer's life must be exemplified by good works. We must follow Christ's example. Thus, to his disciples, the Lord Jesus said:

Matthew 5:14-16

⁽¹⁴⁾ Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.
⁽¹⁵⁾ Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Works Must be Pleasing to God

A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit; nor can it fail to bear fruit. If a fruit-bearing tree fails to bring forth good fruit at the proper time, it is barren. Barren trees, however, are cut down and cast into the fire.

So it is among those who profess faith in Christ. The tree is known by its fruit. Barren lives—lives still lived according to the dictates of the old sinful nature—are lives that deny any evidence of Christ's redeeming work. They deny, too, the necessary evidence of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power in that person's life. These barren lives indicate, by their lack of good fruit, that they are devoid of the Spirit

and life of God. Their end is to be cast into the fire—regardless of any outward ‘profession’ of faith in Christ. It is to such as these that the Lord Jesus spoke when he uttered this warning:

Matthew 7:15-20

⁽¹⁵⁾ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? ⁽¹⁷⁾ Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ⁽¹⁸⁾ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ⁽²⁰⁾ Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Concerning false teachers, and other false professors of the faith, the Lord will announce these solemn words:

Matthew 7:21-23

⁽²¹⁾ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ⁽²²⁾ Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ⁽²³⁾ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Again, the Lord will declare:

Matthew 25:41

⁽⁴¹⁾ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: (See vv.31-46)

These people had works all right—works of iniquity. While professing to act in the name of Christ, they were ‘evil-doers’. (Matt. 7:23 NIV) But of good works, or works pleasing to God, they had none. These people had works pleasing to men, and men commended them for their charitable acts. Their hearts, however, were not right with God. Therefore, all their acts of charity, benevolence, kindness and mercy will not avail them at the judgment seat of Christ. God judges a person according to his works. However, for a person's good works to prove acceptable and pleasing to God, they must arise from a regenerated life and a sanctified heart.

It is a serious and solemn matter to profess faith in Christ, yet not belong to Christ. A person belongs to Christ only through union with him in his life, death and resurrection. That person must be united to Christ through spiritual regeneration or rebirth. This involves faith in the redeeming and atoning work of Christ on his behalf. It also involves his being sanctified by God's Holy Spirit, and bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit in his life.

Concerning false professors within the church, however, the apostle John records these words of the Lord Jesus:

John 15:1-6

⁽¹⁾ I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. ⁽²⁾ Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ⁽³⁾ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. ⁽⁴⁾ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

⁽⁵⁾ 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. ⁽⁶⁾ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

Part 5

What Kind of Works are Good Works?

For a believer, those works are good which honour and glorify God and which benefit mankind. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind; and our neighbour as ourselves. (Luke 10:27) By their very nature, we cannot do the kind of works that Christ did; nor can we attain to the perfect quality of his works. However, we can still do works that honour and please the Father. If Christ had time to attend to the sick, to speak to the lonely, and to serve rather than be served, how much more should we do likewise?

Love Your Neighbour As Yourself

We cannot claim to have honoured God in the *first* great commandment, if we have failed to honour him in the *second*. For he who said:

Luke 10:27a

^(27a) ...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind... {*Deut. 6:5*}

Then added these words:

Luke 10:27b

^(27b) ...and thy neighbour as thyself. {*Lev. 19:18*} (See Luke 10:25-37)

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable exemplifies practically the kind of help we should provide willingly for our neighbour. (Luke 10:29-37)

Love to Our Neighbour

Practical Examples

The Lord requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Effectively, this means that we must care for our neighbour as for ourselves. If we see a need, then we must help to meet that need. If our neighbour requires assistance of some kind, and we are able to provide that assistance, then, in the Lord's name, we must give the help that is needed—cheerfully, and because we care. Nor must we delay in providing the needed help, or make excuses for failing to act in time. To this end, the Scripture says:

Proverbs 3:27-28

⁽²⁷⁾ Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do *it*. ⁽²⁸⁾ Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. (Cf. Prov. 14:31)

In practical terms, we must visit the sick, the housebound and the lonely; or those in hospitals, hospices, care homes, prisons or other institutions. In our service to them, we must care for their material, as well as their spiritual needs; and we must provide them with comfort, hope and encouragement. (Matt. 25:34-40) To those in genuine need, we must contribute items such as food and clothing; being prepared to share freely of the things that—in his providence—the Lord has freely given to us. Thus, in sending forth the twelve on their mission, the Lord said:

Matthew 10:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. ⁽⁸⁾ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. (See vv.1-15)

In reminding forgiven believers of their obligation to share all things with others, the apostle Paul says:

Ephesians 4:28

⁽²⁸⁾ Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. (See vv.22-32)

We must not only *speak* kindly and compassionately, but we must also *act* kindly and compassionately. Faith without works is dead, and no dead person has the Spirit of Christ living within him. Inasmuch as we have done it unto one of the least of these, his brethren, we have done it unto Christ. Failing to do good to those in need, is failing to do good unto Christ. Thus, the Scripture declares:

Matthew 25:40

⁽⁴⁰⁾ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. (See vv.34-39)

Matthew 25:45

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. (See vv.41-44,46)

A Pure, Sincere and Humble Heart

Good works, or offerings or gifts to God are not acceptable before him if we have neglected to do what God requires. We cannot compensate for a heart that is not right with God by the offering of sacrificial gifts. To this end, the Scripture says:

Micah 6:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, *and* bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? ⁽⁷⁾ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, *or* with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, the fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul? (See vv.1-5)

We cannot, of course, offer our firstborn for the sin of our soul. Again, no amount of sacrifice is ever acceptable to God, if that sacrifice does not originate from a pure, sincere, and humble heart.

What God Requires

What does the Lord require of his people? The Scripture replies:

Micah 6:8

⁽⁸⁾ He hath showed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (See vv.9-16)

God requires that each one of his redeemed and holy people demonstrate justice, mercy and humility in their lives. We ought to show *justice*, or absolute fairness and equity, in our dealings with all our fellow men and women. We should extend *mercy*, or tender love and compassion, toward our

neighbour—and especially toward the needy within the church of God. We should exhibit *humility*—the opposite of pride—in our walk with God and in our attitude toward our fellow-believer.

A heart filled with envy, pride, greed, malice, ill will; and a gossiping, tale bearing, backbiting and deceitful or lying tongue, are an abomination in the sight of a holy and righteous God. These are just some of the 'sins of the flesh' (or works of the flesh) that we must utterly forsake. Only by doing so, will the Lord accept and honour our good works, and receive our gifts and sacrifices in his name.

We must ever remember that God has not only *saved* us by grace, but he is also *keeping us secure* by his grace. Let each of us, therefore, take heed to ourselves, lest—because of a proud heart and a haughty spirit—we stumble and fall. Thus, it is written in the Word of God:

Proverbs 16:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ Pride *goeth* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (See v.19; cf. Prov. 11:2; 18:12)

Part 6

Worship Without Works is an Abomination

The greatest gift or sacrifice we can offer to God is nothing compared with honouring God in heart and life. As we have indicated above, the Lord requires that we act justly or fairly in all our dealings with other people; for the Lord is a just and holy God. He requires that we love mercy and show compassion toward those who are in need; for the Lord is a merciful and compassionate God. He requires that we walk humbly with him, and not in the pride and conceit of our hearts; for the Lord is a great King, and his name is to be feared. Concerning the holiness of God, the psalmist says:

Psalms 99:5

⁽⁵⁾ Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; *for he is holy.*

Psalms 99:9

⁽⁹⁾ Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God *is holy.* (See vv.1-8)

Concerning the tender mercy or compassion of God, the Scripture says:

Psalms 103:6-12

⁽⁶⁾ The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

⁽⁷⁾ He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

⁽⁸⁾ The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

⁽⁹⁾ He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* forever.

⁽¹⁰⁾ He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

⁽¹¹⁾ For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

⁽¹²⁾ As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (See vv.1-5)

The same Scripture continues:

Psalms 103:13-18

⁽¹³⁾ Like as a father pitieth *his* children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

⁽¹⁴⁾ For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we *are* dust.

⁽¹⁵⁾ *As for* man, his days *are* as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

- (16) For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.
- (17) But the mercy of the LORD *is* from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;
- (18) To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. (See vv.19-22)

Concerning the absolute sovereignty of God, the Scripture says:

Malachi 1:14b

- (14b) ...for I *am* a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name *is* dreadful among the heathen.

Or, as expressed by the NIV:

Malachi 1:14b

- (14b) "...For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations." (NIV)

These are the kinds of good works that are pleasing to God, and that honour his name. If, however, we do not practise these good works, then all our worship, all our service, all our sacrifices, all our thanksgiving, and all our prayers and praise to the Lord are an abomination in his sight. He will reject them utterly.

Hypocritical Service is an Abomination

Good works become an abomination in God's sight when a person performs them from a sinful and rebellious heart, from an unsanctified life, or as a cloak to cover a hypocritical life-style.

A person may appear outwardly pious or religious. God, however, knows his heart. No amount of outward show of religion, or practise of good works, can ever commend a person to God or win his approval, if that person's heart is not right with God. A hypocrite is a 'play actor'—one who acts a part. *But there are no parts for actors in the kingdom of God.*

A person may profess to be a believer. However, if for one reason or another, his heart is not right with God, then his sacrifices of praise and worship, and his good works, are totally unacceptable to the Most High God. To this end, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 58:4b

- (4b) ...ye shall not fast as ye *do this* day, to make your voice to be heard on high. (See vv.1-4a)

Or, with the NIV:

Isaiah 58:4b

- (4b) "...You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high." (NIV)

Insincere fasting is hypocritical fasting. Insincere religious service of any kind, is hypocritical service. If we would truly honour God with our good works and pious exercises, then these works and exercises must come from a sincere, clean, and humble heart. God does not listen to the prayers of his people when we, his people, do not fully acknowledge him as Lord of our lives, or when we attempt to conceal our sins and transgressions.

'In These I Delight'

The Word of God expresses very clearly, the kind of worship and service in which God delights:

Isaiah 58:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ *Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? ⁽⁷⁾ Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

The same Scripture continues:

Isaiah 58:9b-11

^(9b) ... *If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; ⁽¹⁰⁾ And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: ⁽¹¹⁾ And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. (See vv.12-14)*

In a similar vein to the above, James says:

James 1:26-27

⁽²⁶⁾ *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. ⁽²⁷⁾ 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. (See vv.19-25)*

These are the things in which God delights. (Jer. 9:24.) These are the kinds of good works that are glorifying to God and worthy of reward in heaven—provided a person does them willingly and cheerfully, and from a humble and sanctified heart.

Part 7

Works of Spiritual Instruction

The Work of Preaching and Teaching

Concerning those who would aspire to teach others in the doctrine and principles, James says:

James 3:1

⁽¹⁾ My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. (See v.2)

It should go without saying that no-one can possibly be qualified to teach God's Word unless they have had a personal saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The teaching of God's Word ought never to be undertaken by unregenerate individuals—no matter how highly gifted, talented or qualified. Whatever their gifts or qualifications, those living in spiritual darkness cannot teach the way of light.

Importance of Teaching Sound Doctrine

The work of preaching and teaching is an important and necessary work. It is also a very demanding and time-occupying work. A person ought not to undertake this work lightly, or without due and careful preparation. The work of teaching, and the accuracy of our teaching, will exert a powerful influence—either for good or for bad, for better or for worse—on the minds and lives of others. Thus we must ensure that we know the Word of God thoroughly ourselves, before we ever presume to teach that Word to others.

Those who engage in the work of teaching must be aware of the greater responsibilities that they are under, and the greater strictness by which the Lord will judge them. This applies to anyone who teaches God's Word—whether he be a pastor, Bible class teacher, Sunday School teacher, youth leader, elder, deacon, missionary or any other form of Christian teacher. He must ensure that he teaches God's Word correctly; and strictly according to sound doctrine.

Inadequate Knowledge Leads to Errors of Faith and Practice

Failure to know and to understand the whole of God's Word will inevitably lead to errors of teaching. Errors in teaching will result, in turn, in corresponding errors in belief and practice within the church. A 'minor' mistake, misinterpretation, or misunderstanding in one area of God's Word, may later result in greater and more serious mistakes, misinterpretations, or misunderstandings. Unless recognised and corrected, these mistakes may culminate in some serious doctrinal and practical errors.

If we are to be faithful in teaching the truths of God's Word to others, we dare not neglect the careful study of that Word, or the secret place of prayer and meditation. If our study, preparation, and prayer periods are inadequate or rushed, then we are in danger of misleading other people with our mistaken interpretations, or by our incorrect views of a particular doctrine or principle.

Proclaiming the Whole Will of God

Not only is it essential to know, understand, and adhere steadfastly to sound doctrine, but it is also essential to proclaim *the whole will* (or counsel) *of God*. (Acts 20:27.) Every subject covered by the Word of God, and of relevance to the Christian faith and life, should be covered—and covered adequately—by those who engage in preaching and teaching. This not only includes everything of a *spiritual* nature

contained in the Word of God, but it also includes everything of a *moral* nature. It includes not only what we must *believe*, but also what we must continually *practise* in our daily lives.

Each Man's Work Will be Judged

It is because of the influence that our teaching will have on other people's lives that the Lord will judge us more strictly. Among other criteria, the Lord will judge us according to how well we ourselves have learned the Word of God, and how well we have taught that Word to other people. In this regard, each one of us will receive a reward according to the degree of our faithfulness to Christ and to his Word. If, in this respect, we have proved consistently unfaithful to the Lord, then we could lose part or all of our reward (although not our salvation). This degree of faithfulness includes the diligence we have employed, or have failed to employ, in making the Word of God known to others. We will suffer loss of reward if we have not been diligent in presenting the Word of God faithfully. On the other hand, we will gain the commendation of Christ, and an eternal reward in heaven, if we have diligently endeavoured always to present the Word of God faithfully. We must do this, however, in love, in humility, without compromise, and according to sound doctrine.

Judgment by Fire

Concerning the strict judgment that the Lord will apply to those who have taught God's Word—or rather, that he will apply to the quality of their teaching—the Scripture says:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

⁽¹⁰⁾ According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon (*cf. 1 Pet. 4:11*). ⁽¹¹⁾ For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (*cf. Acts 4:11-12; Eph. 2:20*).

⁽¹²⁾ Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; ⁽¹³⁾ Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. ⁽¹⁴⁾ If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ⁽¹⁵⁾ If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (See vv.1-23)

The judgment by fire or 'revelation with fire' (v.13) pertains to the strict or searching judgment of teachers of God's Word, and of the quality of their teaching. The sure and immovable foundation has already been laid, and that foundation is the Rock of our faith: the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Preachers and teachers of God's Word are responsible for building upon that foundation, and upon that foundation alone. However, the Lord will assess and judge the quality of the material they use—i.e. the quality of their teaching—and he will reward them accordingly. If they have used worthless material—if their teaching was of little substance or value in the sight of God—then they will suffer loss of reward. They themselves will be saved, *but only as one escaping through the flames* (v.15 NIV).

Thus, it is the believer's duty and responsibility to be faithful in his service for the Master. He will judge each one of us according to our works. We will be rewarded, or will forfeit our reward (although not our salvation), according to the diligence we have employed in exercising the particular gifts that God has given us. If we have failed to serve others in their need, then we have failed to serve Christ. If we have been careful to serve others, and have ministered to their needs, then we have served the Lord of Glory and ministered to him.

