

Life-works

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"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" Gal. 6: 10.

If aught could enhance the value of these lovely words, it would be the fact of their being found at the close of the Epistle to the Galatians. In the progress of this very remarkable writing, the inspired apostle cuts up by the roots the entire system of legal righteousness. He proves, in the most unanswerable way, that by works of law, of any sort, moral or ceremonial, no man can be justified in the sight of God. He declares that believers are not under law in any way whatever, either for life, for justification, or for walk — that if we are under law, we must give up Christ; we must give up the Spirit of God; we must give up faith; we must give up the promises. In short, if we take up legal ground, in any shape whatever, we must give up Christianity and lie under the actual curse of the law.

We do not attempt to quote the passages, or to go into this side of the question at all, just now. We merely call the earnest attention of the Christian reader to the golden words which stand at the head of this paper — words which, we cannot but feel, come in with incomparable beauty and peculiar moral force at the close of an Epistle in which all human righteousness is withered up and flung to the winds. It is always needful to take in both sides of a subject. We are all so terribly prone to one-sidedness, that it is morally healthful for us to have our hearts brought under the full action of *all* truth. It is, alas, possible for grace itself to be abused; and we may sometimes forget that, while we are justified in the sight of God by faith alone, a real faith must be evidenced by works. We have, all of us, to bear in mind that while *law-works* are denounced and demolished, in the most unqualified manner, in manifold parts of Holy Scripture, yet that *life-works* are diligently and constantly maintained and insisted upon.

Yes, we have to bend our earnest attention to this. If we profess to have life, this life must express itself in something more tangible and forcible than mere words or empty lip-profession. It is quite true that law cannot give life, and hence it cannot produce life-works. Not a single cluster of living fruit ever was, or ever will be, culled from the tree of legality. Law can only produce "dead works," from which we need to have the conscience purged just as much as from "wicked works."

All this is most true. It is demonstrated in the pages of inspiration beyond all possibility of question or demur. But then there must be life-works, or else there is no life. Of what possible use is it to profess to have eternal life; to talk about faith; to advocate the doctrines of grace, while at the same time, the entire life, the whole practical career is marked by selfishness in every shape and form? "Whoso," says the blessed Apostle John, "hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

So also the Apostle James puts a very wholesome question to our hearts, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say* he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked or destitute of daily food, 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?"

Here we have life-works insisted upon in a way which ought to speak home, in the most solemn and forcible way, to our hearts. There is an appalling amount of empty profession — shallow, powerless, worthless talk in our midst. We have a wonderfully clear gospel — thanks be to God for it!

We see very distinctly that salvation is by grace, through faith, not by works of righteousness, nor by works of law. Blessedly true, and our heart praises God for it. But when people are saved, ought they not to live as such? Ought not the new life to come out in fruits? It must come out if it be in; and if it does not come out, it is not there.

Mark what the Apostle Paul says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Here we have what we may call the upper side of this great practical question. Then the other side, to which every true and earnest Christian will delight to give his attention. The apostle goes on to say, "We are His workmanship *created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them.*"

Here we have the whole subject fully and clearly before us. God has created us to walk in a path of good works, and He has prepared the path of good works for us to walk in. It is all of God, from first to last; all through grace, and all by faith. Thanks and praise be to God that it is so! But, let us remember that it is utterly vain to talk about grace and faith, and eternal life, if the "good works" are not forthcoming. It is useless to boast of our high truth, our deep, varied, and extensive acquaintance with Scripture, our correct position, our having come out from this, that, and the other, if our feet are not found treading that "path of good works which God hath before prepared" for us.

God looks for reality. He is not satisfied with mere words of high profession. He says to us, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in *deed* and in *truth*." He, blessed be His name, did not love us in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth; and He looks for a response from us — a response clear, full, and distinct; a response coming out in a life of good works, a life yielding mellow clusters of the "fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus, to the glory and praise of God."

Beloved Christian reader, do you not consider it to be our bounden duty to apply our hearts to this weighty subject? Ought we not diligently to seek to promote love and good works? And how can this be most effectually accomplished? Surely by walking in love ourselves, and faithfully treading the path of good works in our own private life. For ourselves, we confess we are thoroughly sick of hollow profession. High truth on the lips and low practice in daily life, is one of the crying evils of this our day. We talk of grace; but fail in common righteousness — fail in the plainest moral duties in our daily private life. We boast of our "*position*" and our "*standing*;" but we are deplorably lax as to our *condition* and *state*

May the Lord, in His infinite goodness, stir up all our hearts to more thorough earnestness, in the pursuit of good works, so that we may more fully adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things!

P.S. — It is very interesting and instructive to compare the teaching of Paul and James — two divinely inspired apostles — on the subject of "works." Paul utterly repudiates *law-works*. James jealously insists upon *life-works*. If this fact be seized, all difficulty vanishes; and the divine harmony is clearly seen. Many have failed to do this, and hence have been much perplexed by the seeming difference between Romans 4: 5, and James 2: 24. We need not say there is the most perfect and beautiful harmony. When Paul says, "To him that *worketh not*, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness," he refers to law-works. When James says, "Ye see then how that by *works* a man is justified, and not by faith only," he refers to life-works.

This is abundantly confirmed by the two cases adduced by James in proof of his thesis, namely, Abraham offering up his son and Rahab concealing the spies. If you abstract faith from these cases, they were bad works. Look at them as the fruit of faith, and they were life-works.

How marked is the far-seeing wisdom of the Holy Spirit in all this! He foresaw the use that would be made of this passage; and hence, instead of selecting works abstractedly good, He takes up two from the history of four thousand years, which, if they were not the fruit of faith, were bad works.