

"Of Good Works" part 4 WCF 16.2.1, What Good Works Are

2021.10.10 Sabbath School Lesson

Hopewell ARPC, Culleoka, TN

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WCF 16.2 (TPH p928)

II. These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith;^a and by them believers manifest their thankfulness,^b strengthen their assurance,^c edify their brethren,^d adorn the profession of the gospel,^e stop the mouths of the adversaries,^f and glorify God,^g whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto,^h that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life.ⁱ

^a James 2:18, 22

^b Psa 116:12-13; 1 Pet 2:9

^c 2 Pet 1:5-10; 1 John 2:3, 5

^d Mat 5:16; 2 Cor 9:2

^e 1 Tim 6:1; Titus 2:5, 9-12

^f 1 Pet 2:15

^g John 15:8; Phil 1:11; 1 Pet 2:12

^h Eph 2:10

ⁱ Rom 6:22

James 2:8 If you really fulfill *the royal law* according to the Scripture, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*," you do well;⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.¹⁰ For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.¹¹ For He who said, "*Do not commit adultery*," also said, "*Do not murder*." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.¹² So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

¹⁴ What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*." And he was called the friend of God.²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording referenced above)

Okay, we are in the in chapter 16 of good works. We are in the second paragraph. We're going to get more of what good works are, but there's a little bit of that just up front in this paragraph. And the first two, footnotes there, A and B cover kind of what good works, are to some extent, and then the rest of the of the paragraph covers, to some extent, what good works do.

So Lord willing, will you try and get these three proof texts covered and then and thereby have a start on what good works are. And then Lord willing next week we'll move on to the rest of the paragraph for what good works. Do. Let's begin with prayer our father in heaven.

How we thank you for your good commandments, which express your character to us, and specifically the implications of your character for how we ought to love. And for how we ought to live, we praise you for your son, our Lord Jesus. Who. When he became flesh, we beheld his glory, the only begotten of you, full of grace and truth.

That we may both know what the commandments look like. In living example. And also know, when we read the commandments that they have been perfectly fulfilled, we ask, oh God, that you would work on us by your spirit, that you would increase our knowledge of Christ, our experience of grace and that growing by the grace of Christ.

And by the knowledge of Christ, we would grow into the likeness of Christ and produce obedience that is like unto that of our Savior like unto that, which has been counted for us by his doing and that we would, thereby show our thankfulness to you for having saved us knowing from your word, what you like?

So that we can give it to the one who has given us everything. So help us, we pray as we study, give us understanding of your word, particularly in a couple of passages that are quite often either misunderstood or twisted. We pray that you would keep us from either of those things, help us by your spirit.

We ask in Jesus name, amen.

So, 16, 2 reads, these good works done in obedience to God's commandments or the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith and by them, believers manifest, their thankfulness strengthen, their assurance edify their brethren adorn. The profession of the gospel. Stop the mouths of adversaries. Sorry, stop the mouse of the adversaries and glorify God whose workmanship.

They are created in Christ. Jesus. They're unto that having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, the eternal life so you can hear. There's a lot there. Every one of those phrases or clauses covers fairly big idea in there. Actually relatively few proof texts per phrase or clause there, every one of them could have dozens but we're just going to try and cover this this morning.

These good works done in obedience to God's commandments or the fruits and evences of a true and lively faith and by them, believers manifest, their thankfulness. So the the very first phrase or clause, these

good works done in obedience to God's commandments are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith has as its only footnote.

It's only proof text James 2 versus 18 and 22 verse 18 says, 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 and then verse 22. Do you see that faith was working together with his works and by works.

Faith was made perfect. Well, just take a moment there on the word, perfect, because we ordinarily, I think use the word perfect to mean, flawless more than fullness, but the word perfect, both in the Hebrew and in the Greek has more of an emphasis on fullness and even finality finding its full and final end.

And so, he's not saying that the faith was, it was incomplete and he's not saying that the faith had a flaw until it had works. And you could see that I think most clearly second Corinthians 12, if you have not understood that the word, perfect can mean expressed fully or or achieving its purpose, then you would be probably bothered by the fact that when Paul is asking for his thorn in the flesh to be taken away, God says, my grace is sufficient for you.

For my strength is made, perfect and weakness and until I understood the words better that verse bothered me because it made it sound like until I came along and brought my weakness. That there was some flaw or imperfection or something missing in God's strength and that can't be true at all.

Can it that would be a horrible thing to think of God. And so me reading my incomplete, very contemporary late English, understanding of the word, perfect into that verse. I was much bothered by it for much my Christian life. Until I learned the way. The word perfect is being used.

My strength is made perfect in weakness. There's a perfection of display. There's achieving, it's it's desire. There's the contrast that is there between God's strength and our weakness so that when anything good comes out of us, it's seen that it's all God's strength and not at all our strength anyway.

So that's second Corinthians, 12 use of the word. Hopefully will will help a inform James 2:22 or your understanding of James. 2:22 you see that faith was working together with his works and by works. Faith was made perfect. That'll help you from ending up being a papist thinking, that your faith kind of initiates you in, Jesus.

But in order for faith and Jesus is righteousness, and Jesus is sacrifice to finally be able fully to work. You got to add your works too, and that obviously cannot be how we read that text. And now, you know why? Because there are using a very flawed and in that way, imperfect understanding of the word perfect.

So Having seen the two specific group texts, one of the things they're doing here and we've noted this several times that the proof texts need to be read in context. And we have to really go all the way back up to verse 8 because we haven't seen a thing in verse 18 or verse 22 about done in obedience to God's commandments.

These good works done in obedience to God's commandments are the fruits and evidence at fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith. So, there are assuming that when you read James 2:18, when you read James 2:22 that you understand that that comes in the context, or you remember, have been taught have heard preached the context, James 2 versus 8.

And following some, I'm just going to read versus 8 through 24, and then we'll come back up. And hopefully get some explanation in time to do the second part of the paragraph. James 2, beginning in verse 8, if you really fulfill the royal law. According to scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well.

But if you show partiality, you commit sin and our convicted by the law as transgressors for, whoever shall keep the whole law. And yet, stumble. In one point, he is guilty of all for he who said do not commit, adultery also said, do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery but you do murder you have become a transgressor of the law, So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty for judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown, no mercy mercy triumphs over judgment.

What does it profit? My brethren. If someone says he has faith but does not have works. Can faith save him. If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food. And one of you says to them department, peace, be warm, be warmed and filled but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body.

What does it profit? Thus faith by itself? If it does not have works as 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. You believe that there is one God you do.

Well, even the demons believe and tremble. But to you want to know, oh foolish man, that faith without works. As dead was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac, his son on the older. Do you see that faith was working together with his works and by works.

Faith was made perfect. And the scripture was fulfilled which says Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness and he was called the friend of God. He see then that a man is justified by works. And not by faith. Only probably should do a little bit of work on the word justified.

There we ordinarily. Think and hear of the word justified, in the way that it is must commonly use, which is accounted righteous or given a legally righteous standing, but this word is also used in some places. For instance, as wisdom is justified by her children or when they see Jesus and what he does and how he answers.

It says, and they all justified God well wisdom's children don't make wisdom righteous and the Jews who were sitting in judgment, upon Jesus Christ. Now believing him now, accusing him, and we'll see how that ends. And we've been seeing how that ends in Luke 23. Certainly did not give God right standing.

So it's important that we see that this word often means, vindicated, Identified, a righteousness. That is their already and displayed, that. That righteousness is true and that, that righteousness is real. And this way wisdom is vindicated or justified by her children, You follow God's word. You believe you have the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom and you follow his word, which is, which gives you the instructions of wisdom and you become an example of the wisdom of God and how, right?

And just it is. So also when the people justified God, as they observed, the Lord Jesus. They were identifying and declaring something that God had just demonstrated about him. They were not accounting it for him. And so when you see Abraham justified here by works, and not by faith, only in verse 24, for instance, or sorry.

Abraham in verse 21 was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar and then you see them that a man is justified by works and not by faith only. You don't have to all of a sudden panic and think oh what if the reformation was wronged similar to the word?

Perfect is used in different ways. The word justified is used in different ways. Okay. So back up to verse 8, if you really fulfill the royal law. Now, this doesn't not mean that there were, there was a moral law on the old testament. Now, there's a new moral law in the New Testament.

It does recognize that the royal the moral law that we had from God as our creator. We also have from Jesus as our King, and since we know that Jesus in his humanity, perfectly loves God and as we'll be hearing in the sermon Lord willing. This morning, also perfectly loves his neighbor.

It does not surprise us. That Jesus is kingly moral. Law is exactly the same as God's creatorly divine moral law. And so when he says, if you really fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, not the Jesus came up with something to replace the moral law, but the Jesus was the one who gave you deuteronomy.

Jesus is the one who gave you vidicus and numbers, and when he gives you the summary, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. He's including all of the commandments in that neighbor, love. So that if you commit adultery or maybe you you don't commit adultery but you murder or maybe you don't commit adultery and you don't murder but you do steal.

You're still breaking the law of King Jesus and someone who thinks it's okay to break the law of King. Jesus does not have good ground to stand on to think that he is a subject of King Jesus. That's what the royal law is. The law of liberty is how it's described to those of those who have been shown mercy.

Well, let me of read down that far so you can hear that point again from the text. If you really love, if you really fulfill royal law. According to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well, but if you show partiality. Okay. So, you know, they were playing favoritism toward rich guys in church.

That's how we got here. You commit sin and you were convicted by the law as transgressors now. He knows people in church. Are our likely to say, well, I'm not saved by being nice to the poor guy, I'm saved by trusting in Jesus, and he's trying to show them that the Jesus who saves you by the righteousness that he has done.

Also changes you to produce in you love for the poor guy and faithfulness to your wife. So for whoever shall keep the whole lawn yet. Stumble. In one point he has guilty of all for he who said do not commit. Adultery also said, do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery but you do murder you have become a transgressor of the law so speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.

Now, we don't have time to go into the beginning of Romans 8, because if I read you the text and start explaining it, I'll end up preaching the first third of Romans 8, to get back to preaching James 2 and we'll never make it to the next part, needless to say, the laws, being understood in two ways, the law, as it relates to somebody who is powered by his flesh.

And the beginning of Romans chapter 8 is a law of sin and death because you're flesh. Never keeps it only breaks it. So according if you are still powered by your flesh, you don't have Christ. You're not united to him through faith. You're not in dwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Oh, you have is you trying to obey the law? Only produces. That's all you can do without Jesus but he says the law of the spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death. Because if you are in Christ Jesus you already now. Have no.

Romans 8, verse 1 but also you have in you Christ's, holy spirit, who is for you? A spirit of life, who is for you, a spirit of freedom. He actually applies Christ to you. So that although you are frustrated by the amount of sinning, you can continue to do.

Remember the second half of Romans 7, I guess I didn't read it to you, but all explain a preach it. Anyway, the although you are frustrated by the sinning that you continue to do, you are actually walking according to the righteous requirements of God's law. It is your standard that you love.

Now you delight in it, you hate your sin and you are also growing being made more and more like it. So you don't live according to the flesh in which case you would die. But by the spirit you are putting to death, the deeds of the body, which shows that you have been made alive in Christ and that you will live.

So this language of the law of liberty is not describing some other set of commandments. It's describing a circumstance of the soul. In relationship to the Holy Spirit in relationship to the Lord Jesus, that you have been liberated in order to obey this law just like, in Ephesians 2, you're not.

You're you're saved. Not of works so that no. So that no man can boast for we are, has workmanship created in Christ Jesus. For what good works. The same good works that couldn't save you or the works for which you have been created, God by Jesus applied to us, by his spirit, frees us to obey his law.

That's what the law of liberty means. So now perhaps you have heard people say oh well I hold to the royal law of Jesus Christ, love your neighbor as yourself. I don't have to obey all those commandments first commandments are the royal law. Love your neighbor as yourself as a summary and in the context in which he uses the phrase, the royal law.

He is saying, disobeying any of those commandments breaks the royal law. So if you want to hold to the royal law. Praise God. You have a Messiah King. A God man who sits on the throne of heaven. You are his subject and both as God's creature and Christ's subject you obey the same law.

Well, if you've ever heard someone say, well, I don't hold to the all of the commandments, unless they've been specifically repeated in the New Testament, which by the way, they're all specifically repeated in the New Testament. But I'm, you know, they say and that's even I hold to the law of liberty.

I've been freed from those things. No even freed to obey. If you have the law of liberty it's the law that describes. What believers had been freed to do and if you've been freed to show mercy, then that is good evidence of a true and lively faith. These good works done in obedience to God's commandment or the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.

So, you know, if you were, you know, kind of skeptically critically coming at coming at the Westminster confession and you're studying chapter, 16, paragraph two and you look at the footnote and you say, okay, verse 18, someone will say you, you have faith. I've worked show me further than works.

Okay. First 22, you see that faith was working together. Okay, it doesn't say obedience to God's commandments. Well, it follows this great big paragraph on obedience to God's commandments and it's been. It was produced for us from God, by means of pastors who kind of expected us to know our Bibles.

It wasn't for a scripturally ignorant church to judge whether the church was was teaching. Well, it was for a scripturally instructed people to apply the Bible to their lives and be able to have the teaching of the Bible in short summary so that we wouldn't get lost or go astray in understanding anyone passage.

Okay. So continuing, praise God, that God's mercy to us as triumphed over our judgment and one of the ways that it shows us is that produces our being merciful and the one who loves Jesus and thrills at the idea that Jesus has shown him. Mercy loves to display the effect of what Jesus has done by showing others mercy.

He doesn't get tickled at how wonderful he is. Now, when when someone recognizes that he's being treated mercifully, he gets tickled at how. Wonderful Jesus is that not only, could he be merciful to me? He could actually make someone like me. Merciful, that's a law of liberty. I've been liberated from self-seeking.

I've been liberated from hard-heartedness I've been made merciful like my savior and that's what we pursue as we pursue his commandments. Don't ever let someone, you know, say the word commandments like they just stuck too big. A piece of wasabi in their mouth. All right, verse 14. What does it profit?

My brethren. If someone says he has faith but does not have works. Can faith. And obviously some translations will in insert the word such, but it means can statements about or ideas about Jesus save him, so it's not just faith without works. It's faith without Christ. That's what this passage is teaching because there's an idea of faith that is just statements about Jesus or concepts about Jesus.

And he's going to go on to say the demons, get the concept, but they don't have the Christ of the concept. And if you have a few statements about Jesus's, God, and Jesus became, man, and Jesus perfectly obeyed and Jesus fully attended for sin, and that's the only way you can be saved.

Therefore I can do whatever I want. Then the apostle here, the Holy Spirit here by the apostle comes and says you've got a lot of statements about Jesus that you're calling faith. But you don't have Jesus, you haven't been changed the character of Jesus isn't being produced in you.

So, you never actually believed into him. So, this is this paragraph in James. Chapter 2 is not a question of can faith save you without works. It's saying that there's no such thing as faith in Jesus, or into Jesus, to use the preposition. That, as more often used even in the New Testament, there's no such thing as faith into Jesus without works.

So if you're just if you're going to call a collection of ideas faith, you've got faith. That can't save you. Okay? What does it profit? My brethren. If someone says he has faith but does not have works. Can faith save them? The implied answer is no, just like a collection of ideas about warmth cannot make someone warm and a collection of ideas about food cannot make someone full, right?

So if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them department, peace, be warm and filled. Well I gave you warmth and food. I'll give you warmth and fullness. Now you didn't you talked about warmth and fullness and you probably have a good concept of how the happens.

You agree with it, but you don't have it and you didn't give it to him. Having a concept about Jesus is not the same as having Jesus, if we're trusting in correct ideas about Jesus, rather than trusting in the Jesus, who is described to us by those ideas, then, yeah, that won't produce works.

You haven't been liberated. You don't have a king, you're not a subject of the kingdom. Of course, you're not obeying his commandments If a brother or sister is naked nested of daily food. And one of you says to them department, peace, be warm 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, It's not true faith. It's not saving faith. It's not faith into Christ. 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 work.

So you've got faith that doesn't produce works, it's just a sack of ideas but I've got faith that produces works because my faith is in Christ and Christ. Produces works verse 19. You believe there is one God. You do well, even the demons believe and tremble. But do you want to know a foolish man?

And the word foolish here is actually a word that is translated in other places empty or in vain and the apostle. Paul, some people like to set Paul over against James with this. This passage apostle Paul actually uses this word in the same way, there are a number of places where he says, unless you have believed in vain or unless I have labored in vain and it's the same word.

That's that's translated, foolish here, and consistently the spirit, both through Paul, and through James says that there's a kind of theological agreement with the truth of the Bible that does not belong to those who have the reality. It's empty. It's a shell and so Paul would talk to churches that he addressed as saints because covenantally set apart to God on earth.

The they were a body of saints and when you interact with one another in a church, you give the judgment of charity. According to God, having set someone apart as part of his church and still, he would warn them that you can be a member of a church, that is a true church and that is full of other believers.

But you yourself might not genuinely be united to Christ because you're not trusting in Him. You might even be agreeing with the teaching of the church intellectually, but not responding to Jesus the way that that teaching tells you to respond to him personally. So that's a word there in verse 20, that is used.

Consistently through the New Testament showing that there's perfect agreement between James and Paul. Which of course there is because they're being carried along by the same, Holy Spirit. But do you want to know a foolish man that faith without works as dead was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar.

So you know chapter 15 in Genesis Abraham believed God and his credit to him is righteousness chapter. 22 of Genesis God produces in Abraham's response when he offers Isaac the fruit of his faith and then God actually responds to him. Now I have seen that and God responds to the fruit or the evidence of Abraham's.

Faith was Abraham not justified already back in. Chapter 15? No, of course, he was justified already. And yet what he did, demonstrates, the reality of his faith and God responds, not because of how good what Abraham did was. But because what Abraham did was the fruit of something that was credited, credited Abraham with the righteousness of Jesus.

And so ultimately even in Genesis 22, when he offers this on Isaac on the altar and he's and God says, now I have seen that, you have not withheld, your son, you're only son from me and he restates and expands the statement of the covenant promises. He's not saying you did so good Abraham.

Here's what you were earned, he's saying this great goodness that you have done even though it's all flawed and perfect as in it. But this great goodness that you have done, has come out of the righteousness of Christ. That was accounted for you. All the way back in chapter 15 and God rewards.

Our works not on a basis of merit, but on a basis of grace that'll be later in the in the paragraph and we are out of time. We've already done earlier, I think the rest of well it's just verse 24, James 2. Well, if you want to take this home and look at it, you'll find that when we get to first Peter 2, he's actually interpreting and applying the section from Psalm 116 that that's, that's on the page there and that'll be a good study to take those together.

Even if we had time, I don't think I would start on 116 right now. All right, let's pray how we thank you. Our king. Our deliverer that your royal law is that very law of our creator for you, our creator to and you gave yourself to obey in our place and you give yourself to us by faith.

We thank you for your spirit who is for us, a spirit of life who has set us free from the law of sin and death. So that we do not try to keep your law and dependence upon our flesh or in independence from you. But your spirit applies you to us our Lord Jesus.

We pray that you would be glorified by the good works that you produce and our life as the fruit of faith. And we ask especially now, as we go to do that, great work of worshiping you that you'd make us to do it out of union with you by your spirit carrying us along and producing in us your own character.

Even as you yourself lead us from glory, what a marvelous salvation and kingdom and freedom, you have brought us into, be glorified, our redeemer, and what comes of what we have just learned and in what comes now in the public worship, where we ask it in your name. Amen.