

Indispensable Good Works

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THE Bible holds out no promise of a reward for laziness. In God's plan no provision is made for idleness. Heaven is pictured before us as a place of activity, and heavenly beings as untiring workers. The Saviour said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17), and again "I must work the works of Him who sent Me" (John 9:4). Of the angels we read that they are all "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

This being the case, it cannot be thought that those who are to inherit salvation should be idle. The apostle Paul labored with his hands, as an example to the believers, and left on record the divine commandment, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). But *the frequent exhortation to work is with special reference to spiritual things, rather than physical*. Jesus said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life" (John 6:27). So the apostle Paul says that the reward will be given to those who patiently continue in well doing (Rom. 2:7); and the Saviour says: "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev. 22:12).

Again we read that Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). And again the Holy Spirit, through the apostle James, puts a premium upon good works, in these words: "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). Many other texts might be quoted to show that the Christian life is to be one of activity, and that good works are not only necessary, but are the one indispensable requisite.

Works, and works alone, in the judgment, will determine a man's condition for eternity. God "will render to each one according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6). The question which the judgment will settle will not be, "What has this man believed?" or "How has he felt?" but "What are his works?" There is no place for the cavil of those who think that they are enunciating a principle of which the Bible is ignorant, when they say, "God will not damn a good man for his opinions nor for his belief." People are neither condemned nor saved because of their opinions, but because of their deeds.

"What!" exclaims one, "are you going to deny the doctrine of justification by faith?"—Not by any means. I would go so far as to claim that *the doctrine of justification by faith is the one great theme of the Scriptures, and that all other things are but parts of it*. But the thing to be emphasized by the above remarks and quotations is that faith works. (See Gal. 5:6). No truer statement was ever made than this, that "**faith is not a sedative,**

but a stimulant.” Faith is intensely active, and the source of all spiritual activity. *While it is true that only a man’s works will be considered in the judgment, it is equally true that the character of his works will be determined by his faith.* Where there is no faith, there can be no enduring works.

The works which are acceptable to God are “good works.” But perfect goodness resides in God alone. (See Mark 10:18). The righteousness which we must have is God’s righteousness. (Matt. 6:33). Of His own ways God says: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). Who, then, can hope to present to God the good works that will be equal to His?—None but those who, like Paul’s brethren, are ignorant of God’s righteousness, would be presumptuous enough to think such a thing possible. *Only God can do the works of God.* Therefore when the Jews said to Christ, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” He replied, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:28, 29).

The words of Paul to the Philippians, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” are often quoted by those who forget the words immediately following, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13). *God Himself does the good works which, when exhibited in the lives of men, render them pleasing to Him.* So the Saviour said: “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:21).

How, then, do they appear in men? This is the “mystery of godliness.” It is the mystery of “God manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1, 14). *This was done to demonstrate the possibility of God’s dwelling in human flesh. The mystery of the works of God being manifested in the lives of men, is simply the mystery of the incarnation.*

The incarnation of Jesus Christ, the divine son of God, “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” is the great theme of the gospel. “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him.” Colossians 1:27; 2:9, 10. (*Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 241).

In Christ “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). Therefore when Christ in His completeness dwells in the heart by faith, that person will be “filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3:17–19).

What words could be more full of comfort, and more suggestive of the infinite possibilities of the Christian life than those in Psalm 31:19: “Oh, how great is Your

goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!" Think of it! God himself has wrought the good works with which we are to appear before His throne. And how are we to get them?—Simply by trusting Him; by appropriating those good works by faith. *God Himself comes to dwell with those who believe His word, and He lives out His own life in them.* This thought is enough to fill every soul with love and joy and confidence.

The Christian life means an actual life. But life means activity. *To live a godly life, therefore, means the living of a life in which the acts of God Himself are manifested.* The apostle Paul said: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). And again: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

The secret of the whole matter is to acknowledge that in us dwells no good thing, and that God alone is good; that we are nothing, but that He is everything, that we are weakness, but that power belongs to God, and that God has the power to manifest Himself in the flesh today as well as eighteen hundred years ago, if we will but let Him, and to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God. Exaltation comes only through self-abasement. Christian activity comes only through passive submission to God, as the clay is passive in the hands of the potter. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth" (Ps. 115:1).

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