

# A People Zealous for Good Works

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## Hope Protestant Reformed Church

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Our Scripture reading this evening is Titus 2.

1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: 2 That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. 3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. 6 Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. 7 In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, 8 Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. 9 Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; 10 Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. 11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 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. 15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

So far we read God's holy word.

The text for this sermon is verse 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.

If you love in the Lord Jesus Christ, do you consider Hope Protestant Reformed Church to be a congregation that is zealous for good works? Do you view yourself and your

family as being zealous for good works? Children and young people, if I would go to the school where you are students and I would ask around about you, would people in any way indicate that you are zealous for good works? That question arises right out of the text that we consider tonight. The text raises the question.

Much of the text we read with much appreciation and understanding, Christ gave himself for us, the atonement, the cross of Jesus Christ. The purpose of that according to the text is to redeem a people for himself and to sanctify a people, a people that are his peculiar people, and immediately election comes to mind. We are a chosen people, part of that glorious body of those who are elect. All of those doctrines are familiar to us and they are very precious doctrines. We love them and we ought to love them because they are the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but then that last phrase catches our attention, "zealous of good works." That's a bit different. This people who are called peculiar, a people who are elect, redeemed, sanctified, are a people who are to be zealous for good works. If you will, that's the goal, that's the ultimate idea that Jesus has in mind as he goes to the cross; this is what he is determining, a people zealous for good works.

That is entirely in harmony with this epistle. Paul writes this epistle to a fellow minister of the Gospel, to Titus, who was trained and perhaps even converted under the Apostle Paul. We read in Titus 1:4, "To Titus, mine own son after the common faith," so either he was converted under the apostle or he was trained under him. Paul calls him his own son according to common faith. He was a minister that Paul had tremendous confidence in. When there was a controversy in the churches in Galatia over whether or not the Gentiles were required to keep the Old Testament law and a conference was called in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas went back there and they took with them Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, knowing that Titus would conduct himself wisely, as he did. Later when there was trouble in the church at Corinth, bad trouble, division, fighting, opponents of Paul, Judaizers, immorality, Paul sent Titus there to preach the word and to show the people how they must live. Now we learn from this epistle that Paul leaves Titus with another very difficult work: to establish and organize a congregation on the island of Crete, an island where the people are not known for godly living but quite the contrary, for their immorality.

The opening of this epistle in the very first verse of chapter 1 gives really the theme, "the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness." The acknowledging of the truth or the doctrine which is after godliness. That sets forth the twofold emphasis in this epistle: on the one hand sound doctrine, on the other hand, godly living and good works. In this epistle, the Holy Spirit teaches that the church must have sound doctrine and the church that embraces sound doctrine, that will produce within them a life of good works as they live out of the truth. The text, therefore, is clearly tied to the whole theme of this epistle. It sets forth the truth, this is the goal of Jesus Christ: his goal is a people that will be zealous for good works.

That's what we take as the theme for the sermon this evening, "A People Zealous for Good Works." You may notice that the text says, a people zealous of good works. That's not unusual in Scripture. If you would sometimes read in the Bible "faith of Jesus Christ,"

faith is a very active word and it means a faith in Jesus Christ. So likewise here when you have "zealous of good works," the idea is they are zealous for good works. That's what we take as a theme, a people zealous for good works. We will notice, first of all, their identity; secondly, their formation; and finally, their blessing.

When we say identity, you understand I don't mean that in the sense that they have a name that identifies them, but rather they have a particular characteristic that separates them from other people and the characteristic is they are zealous for good works. Now before we explain that entire idea, we need to look at the idea of good works. What is a good work? I would define a good work, it could be defined different ways but this way: a good work is an activity of the believer performed out of the power of God's grace, so it's the activity of a believer performed out of the power of God's grace that arises out of a heart that is full of love and thankfulness to God. It's an activity that God approves. It's performed out of the power of his grace. It's coming out of his heart full of love and thankfulness. Add to that two implications then, this will be an activity that will honor God. That should be obvious. It's a good work that will honor him. At the same time, it will demonstrate the love for the neighbor.

A good work is something God approves. Let's look at that. First of all, it's something God approves and that's to be understood because God is the only good. If you're going to talk about a good work, then it surely must be something God approves because as Jesus reminded the young ruler that so easily used the term "good Master," Jesus stopped him and said, "Why do you call me that? There is only one good which is God." He is the only good and the standard of all good." And God has clearly revealed to us what is good and what he approves, namely his law. This is what's good. This is what God approves, that you serve God alone and worship him as he requires; that you, his children, obey your parents, that we all obey those in authority. That's what God approves. That we keep the Sabbath day holy. That we love the neighbor and seek his good. That we keep ourselves pure from all immorality. That we love our wives as husbands. That we love our husbands as wives. This is what God demands of us. This is what is good.

Jesus performed many good works. At one point, the rulers of the Jews picked up stones to kill him and he asked them in John 10:32, "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" Think of the life of good works. He healed the sick. He gave sight to the blind. He made the lame to walk. He cleansed the leper. He cast out demons. His life was full of good works, things that God approved of, fully in harmony with the law of God. A life of good works.

These good works arise out of love. They arise out of love. Hebrews 10:24 connects good works and love. Listen to what it says, Hebrews 10:24, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." If it is truly a good work in harmony with the law of God, clearly it will arise out of love because the very summary of the law is love God and love your neighbor.

Merely doing something outwardly good, merely doing a kindness to someone, merely coming to church, that doesn't make it a good work, it has to come out of love in our

hearts that we do the work. The Bible illustrates that. One of the most beautiful illustrations is a woman only spoken of in one little part of the chapter in Acts, a woman named Tabitha who was a woman in Joppa and you children remember that this is the woman that Peter raised from the dead, but do you remember her life as it is described there when she died how the widows came around and they were holding up to Peter all the clothes, so many of the clothes that she had made with her own hands for them and for their children, and the Bible says she was full of good works? Why did she do all of that? Why did she make these clothes for the orphans and the widows? Because she loved them. It was a work of love that came out of her heart for the other members of the congregation.

That's, of course, what the Bible says all women should do. They should clothe themselves with good works. Don't worry about fashion. Don't worry about how you look on the outside but clothe yourselves with good works, Paul writes in 1 Timothy. In fact, he exhorts Titus in this very chapter, "Titus, you must in all things show yourself to be a pattern of good works." A pattern of good works. And to Timothy he would write that. "through the Scriptures a man of God is thoroughly furnished unto good works." That's what the Bible will do because the Bible will show to us the calling that we have, to love God and to love the neighbor, and if you love the Scriptures and you take the Scriptures to yourself, they will equip you into a life of good works.

Such a good work in harmony with the law of God coming out of a love which we have in our hearts, such a good work God approves. But the power we said in the definition, you recall, the activity of the believer that God approves, done by the power of God's grace, there is a power. 2 Thessalonians makes that abundantly plain. 2 Thessalonians 2, it speaks of this, this is at the end of the chapter, verses 16 and 17 of 2 Thessalonians 2, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts," and then notice this, "and stablish you in every good word and work." God through Jesus Christ, says Paul, may he establish you, may he ground you in every good word and work. Work, the power comes from Jesus Christ.

It is the love of God that comes upon us and fills our hearts that makes it possible for us to love him and to love each other. It is the grace of God that gives us the strength to do anything that is good in this life. It is the mercy of God that equips us to forgive each other. It's his power working in us that causes us to do good works. That power comes to us through Jesus Christ exactly because we are connected to him by that living spiritual bond of faith. That's what Jesus said in John 15 when he said to his disciples, "I am the vine, you are the branches," and then he said, "without me, ye can do nothing." Nothing. Without Jesus Christ, we do absolutely nothing, but grafted into him by faith as the branch is grafted into a tree, we draw our life from him. We draw our strength from him. Everything that we have that is good in us comes from Jesus Christ and it's the power of the cross, it's the power of the cross that has conquered sin, that now lives and works in us and equips the child of God to do good work.

So much is this true that Ephesians 2:10 says that God has "created us in Christ Jesus unto good works." When God creates us in Christ Jesus, his goal, if you will, is good works, and those good works – this is really astounding – those good works are things that God has "foreordained that we should walk in them." Foreordained doesn't mean merely that God determined what they would be but the foreordained is even more literally that God before prepared in us, he prepared a good work. He determined that we would do a good work but then he so worked in us by the power of his grace that we would live out of that. His strength becomes ours and we live out of the work of God and do the work that God had before ordained that we should walk in them. That's God's goal.

A good work, then we said, is a God-approved activity that a believer is involved in arising out of the power of Jesus Christ that flows to us by faith, but then, thirdly, a good work must honor God. It has to honor him. It can do so in two ways essentially. A good work can honor God directly, that is to say, that a believer using his mouth praises God. How many times did we sing of that today, tonight, of our determination to praise God? We can open up our mouths and sing his praises. We can open our mouths and pray to God and as we are praying to him, we are thanking him and expressing the greatness and the glory of God which causes us to be full of admiration for him. We use our lips. We can talk to each other about the greatness of God, about the marvelous works when we see them on display in the creation, his power, his majesty, his beauty which is on display, and as we are talking about these things, our lips are honoring God.

We can also honor God indirectly, if you will, that the life of the believer shows the power of God in the believer that causes him to live the way that he does. As I said, it's God's love that makes us able to love someone else. His mercy makes it possible for me to forgive someone who sins against me. It's his power of sanctification that causes a believer to walk in obedience. It's his blessing of assurance that a child of God can say, "I know I'm saved. I'm on my way to heaven." God works that assurance in us and ultimately its glorification that God is working in his people. When that comes out in the life of a believer, it is something that is giving glory to God.

So we can give that glory directly by our words or indirectly by our walk of life, but understand that a believer deliberately aims to do that, to give God the glory. Merely opening up the Psalter and singing it and then putting it back in the pew ahead of us, that doesn't give glory to God, merely that external act. An act of kindness all by itself is not a good work just because it was a nice thing to do. That's the error of common grace, that merely the external determines whether or not it is truly good or not. That's not enough. That doesn't make it a good work. It's singing praises out of a heart filled with thankfulness, that honors God deliberately. It's a kindness to the neighbor that reflects very clearly the love of God that we have experienced in our lives. When we, for example, defend the good name of a neighbor whether it's a believer or unbeliever, it doesn't matter, it's a neighbor God puts in our path. If we defend his name, if we seek his good, if we assist him in some need that he or she may have to the point now that we would even say to that neighbor, "Do you understand why I'm doing this? I'm doing this because God has done so much for me. He has demonstrated a love for me so undeserved and so abundant in its goodness to me that I can't help but doing something good for you.

That's why I'm doing it, because of the love God has shown to me." Because at the end of the day, you don't want it to be said in the neighborhood, "Oh, isn't he a good fellow? He would give you the shirt off his back." Or, "Isn't she a wonderful woman? She would do anything for us." You don't want the praise, you want the praise to go to God.

Consciously, deliberately, we want the praise to go there so that all the world may see that God alone deserves the praise.

If you think about it, what we've just talked about are exactly the three parts of the good work as the Heidelberg Catechism sets it forth. What is a good work, says the Catechism? Well, it's something performed according to the law of God, that's our first point. God approves of it. And secondly, it's performed out of faith. There is the power, faith. And thirdly, it is to God's glory. There is our goal, God's glory. According to the law of God, the law of love, out of faith, a conscious faith in Jesus Christ, and for God's glory.

That's a good work. The text says these are a people zealous for good works. The word "zealous" is literally "they burn with zeal; they burn with enthusiasm." That's the idea of zeal. Someone who is zealous is enthusiastic about something. There is an earnest desire in a zeal. There is a longing for something either to have something or to do something or to enjoy something. That's a zeal, tremendous enthusiasm.

Paul elsewhere in the Scriptures writes of the fact that he and the Pharisees had a zeal for the law of God. Now you can see, what does that do? When a man has a zeal for something, what did that mean for Paul? It meant for him and the Pharisees, number 1: I want to know what the law says. They studied the law day in and day out. They wanted to know the law backwards and forwards. They wanted to know the implications of the law. They wanted to know what the law required. They wanted to know what the law forbid. So they became thoroughly involved and acquainted with the law. Then they sought with all of their might to keep that law. They were zealous for it so they went about their life very carefully making sure they did not break any of the commandments. They did not want to be a lawbreaker. They wanted to keep it because they were zealous for the law of God.

That zeal is something that becomes manifest in a person's life. That's the point. Today people can be zealous for many things. Some are zealous for basketball. Some are zealous for golf. Some are zealous for a clean house. Some have a zeal for fashionable clothes. Some have a zeal for tasty food. Now let's take a particular kind of zeal and demonstrate that this is something that becomes evident in one's life. A man who has a zeal for good music, all right? That's a good thing to have, a zeal for good music. You can understand that a man who has that, music is very much on his mind every day. It's on his mind. He goes into his car and he wants to listen to good music, to make sure that there is a way for him to listen to good music in the car. In his home, he has something that will play good music and it will sound very nice in his home. He wants that. He loves music. He goes to work, if it's possible, he wants it on there. He buys tickets for concerts to listen to good music. Maybe he learns how to play it. Maybe he wants to sing it. Whatever the case, he has a desire, an earnest longing, a zeal to enjoy good music and it is manifest in his life.

Now take that and apply that to the text. A people who are zealous for good works. It's on their mind. They are thinking about it. They have enthusiasm, a desire for good works to be manifest in their life. A man who has a zeal for it lives for good works. He looks for opportunities to do good as many and as often as he can. That desire that he has manifests itself in his life, he does good works. He delights in doing what God approves. He shuns that which God disapproves. Consciously he is doing this day after day. He is eager to have the power of God manifest in his own life. The power of God's grace. The power of his love. The power of his forgiveness. He wants that to be on display. He loves God. He loves the neighbor. He wants that to be manifest in the way he talks to his neighbor and the way he talks to God and about him. He relies on Jesus Christ consciously for this. He knows it's not going to come out of him, it will come out of his faith in Jesus Christ, but he wants the world to know what a great and glorious God Jehovah, his Savior, is. A people zealous for good works, who love to serve God, who desire to obey him, who desire to have the grace of God evident in their lives.

So obviously the question arises, has to arise in a sermon like this: is this true of you? Are you a people zealous for good works? Do your neighbors, you think, see you as someone who is zealous for good works? And that would start with this: do they hear you praising God? Do they hear us praising God with our mouths? Do they experience the love of God that we have experienced, that undeserved love, do they experience that love from us, demonstrating the power of God's love in our hearts, in our lives? Do they experience that as we deal with them? Do they see you ladies and think, "This woman is virtually clothed with good works? She is always seeking to do good." Do they see you young men and young women and say, "Now there is a young man or a young woman that lives a sober life that clearly is seeking to serve his God"? A holy life. Do they say about you children, "You know, those children are different. They are kind to each other. They obey their parents. They include everybody. They don't mock. They don't throw somebody out and say we don't want to play with you. They include." Do they know us at work as being zealous for good works? This is what the text demands.

Now if it's not true, why not? Why are we not necessarily demonstrating a zeal for good works? And the answer is found in the text too in that clearly there is going to have to be some formation of a people who are zealous for good works because that's not natural. The text speaks of the fact that we have to be redeemed from all iniquity. That's what we are by nature, a people of iniquity, and that word "iniquity" is literally "lawless." That's what we are. By nature we are lawless, totally the opposite of being righteous and obedient. Hebrews 1:9 makes that contrast when it says about Jesus, "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity," hated lawlessness, that's the word. There is in us ordinarily no love for the law but rather a hatred of that law and, therefore, a hatred of the God who gave us that law because the law condemns us. It says you're not a good person. You think highly of yourself but the law says you are not a person who is to be admired. We hate the neighbor by nature because we love ourselves.

So that's what we are by nature, we are full of iniquity, we are lawless, but not only that, we are unholy and I get that from the fact that the text says we had to be purified. We had

to be purified because we were unholy. We have unholy thoughts. They are corrupt. We have desires that are evil. Our emotions are impure and our bodies are all too willing and eager to be instruments of sin. That's what we are by nature.

So we are not zealous for good works naturally. We are not. As long as we live out of that old nature, that lawless and unholy nature, as long as we live out of that, quite the opposite is true, there will not be any good works in our lives. We follow after sin. We hate God. We hate the neighbor. We seek only our own good. Not good works but only filthy. But you say, "Wait a minute, Professor, we are God's people though. We have a new life in us. We surely do good works." And I do not take issue with that at all. You are God's people and you do good works. As a congregation, as individuals, you do good works but you understand the text is saying to you and me don't be satisfied with that. Christ Jesus is looking for a people who are zealous for good works, not merely a people who can say, "Yeah, I do good works. See here and see there?" No, we are a people who are zealous for good works, burning with zeal for good works.

And I fear judging from myself, that we are not as zealous for good works as we ought to be, surely, and partly I believe the answer to that, why we are not zealous for good works as we can be for so many things that are earthly, is that we don't want to stand out that way. We don't want to stand out as someone zealous for good works. We want to kind of blend in, especially with the world. We want people to like us. We want people to be nice to us and we know the people of the world hate God and they will hate us if our lives reflect the holiness of God; if our lives reflect a zeal for good works, they will hate us. They will hate us especially when a love for God and a love for the neighbor requires that we speak against sin.

But even in church, we really don't want to be a family that everybody in church says, "Oh, well, yeah, they're really pious. That's all they talk about is God and heaven." We don't want to stand out in school and when one of our classmates is taking God's name in vain, that we would say, "Do you know that is a sin?" We don't want to stand out that way when someone in the class is maybe bragging about the fact that he got away with cheating on a test, we don't want to be the one that says, "You know, that's a sin against God?" When the whole class is fuming mad against the teacher, we don't want to be the one that is giving honor to the teacher and standing out from the rest. And we know that if we will not at least in some way go along with the sins of others, that they will not want to keep our company. They will ostracize us. They won't have anything to do with us.

We don't want to be too different in the world, but not even in church, but the people of God are identified as a people zealous for good works. How do they become that if that's not what we are by nature? Clearly this is a work of Jesus Christ. He forms us into a people zealous for good works. That's what the text says, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The "who," you go back to the previous verse and who is that? It's our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. That's all one there. It's our Savior. Our Savior who is God, who is the Alpha and the Omega, who is one with the Father, one essence who is



the eternal God, that's our Savior. He has the power to transform his people into a people zealous for good works.

And he is also our Lord Jesus Christ, he is the Mediator who came in the flesh. He is the one who came into our flesh in order that he might give himself because that's where the text begins, "Who gave himself for us." That's where it started. Well, you could say it started in eternity, of course, but the work of Jesus Christ who has taken upon himself human flesh and giving himself. He humbled himself and took on the form of a servant. He was willing to live in poverty. He was willing to live in the squalor of sinful men. He allowed himself to be contradicted by sinners, to be humiliated and spit upon and whipped and finally nailed to the cross because, you see, he gave himself to that. He gave himself to the death of the cross. He became accursed for the sake of his people. He took upon himself the wrath. He took the cup of God's wrath and he drank it until it was finished, the wrath against the sins of God's people. He bore that wrath all his life but especially on the cross he took that wrath. He gave himself to physical death, to the tearing apart of body and soul. He gave himself to the grave. He gave himself to eternal death and hell. And all the while that he is giving himself, he is being reproached by wicked men and the fiery darts of Satan and that fiendish mob of devils is attacking him trying to destroy him, he gave himself also to that. No one forced him. He voluntarily came into the world and suffered, laid down his life, descended even into the pit of hell for us.

For us he did that and "for us" always means two things, number 1 it means: he did it in our place. He was our substitute. The wrath that we deserved, he took instead. Where we should have gone, he went in our place so that we would not have to go there, we would never go there. He went as our substitute. Secondly, "for us" means for our benefit. He didn't need to do this for himself. He was the eternally Beloved of the Father. He lived surrounded by the love of God in the very bosom of the Father. He didn't need to do this for himself. He did it for our benefit. For us he gave himself, for those who are called in Scripture children of wrath, those who are full of iniquity, those who are unholy. He gave himself for our benefit, to redeem for himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. Not because there was something special about them in themselves but simply because God loved them, Jesus would give himself for that people.

What tremendous benefits are given to those who are redeemed by Jesus Christ. That first of all, they are redeemed. They are redeemed. Matthew 20:28 says Jesus came "to give his life a ransom for many." A ransom. That's what it is, it's a payment. He paid the price of our liberty. We were in bondage to sin, he paid that price. We are purchased, purchased out of our lawlessness. We are justified in Jesus Christ. What a tremendous thing. The sin that we committed, our lawlessness is swept away. It's gone. It's not on our account but instead the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is ours. We are righteous before God, not the objects of his wrath but those who know God's love. We are redeemed.

That's the chief benefit of the cross, that we are forgiven, that we are righteous in Jesus Christ. That's what we grab hold of first of all, that tremendous work of Jesus, but he

doesn't stop there, he doesn't merely redeem us so that we are now forgiven and justified, he purifies us, says the text. Purifies us and that word "purified" is translated elsewhere "cleansed" and it's exactly the same word that is used in Scripture to describe Jesus' miracle of cleansing the leper. So appropriate because the leper is full, covered with putrefying sores that eat away at his skin and finally would drag him down to the grave. It will kill him. That's what we are, we are spiritual lepers covered with sin, covered with the rot of our depravity, and it's a fatal disease. It will drag us down to eternal death. But we are cleansed. We are cleansed by Jesus Christ.

That sin that afflicts us is a dreadful thing. It's not only something which pollutes and corrupts us but it's a terrible power that enslaves us. Paul would write of the struggle that he has even as a regenerated child of God in Romans 7 when he says, "the good that I would, that I do not, and the evil that I would not, that's what I do." And he cried out at the end of that chapter as we all do in the struggles of our spiritual struggles, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And the answer is Jesus. Jesus does. Based on the redemption of the cross, he sends his Spirit and the Spirit comes into our hearts without asking and he does this miracle of regeneration. He cleanses our hearts and he makes us to be alive with a new life, a life of Jesus Christ, a life that is holy, a life that is always seeking to honor God, always seeking to obey him and that life continues and that spirit continues in us and it works in us powerfully. We are grafted to Jesus Christ. We draw our life from him and we live unto him. We live unto our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What a people. What a benefit. It's important to notice a couple of things in that regard. First of all, Christ forms a people who are zealous for good works, who live out of the power of Jesus Christ out of thankfulness. Making you feel guilty tonight that you do not live a life zealous of good works, if you feel as you leave church, "Well, boy, I can see now I fall way short," and if you feel guilty there is a benefit to guilt, but you understand guilt will not make you zealous for good works. It will not. What makes God's people zealous for good works is thankfulness. It's the knowledge of our wretched condition, our nature. It's the knowledge of what Jesus Christ has done for us. That makes a child of God thankful and it's that that motivates him to be zealous for good works. He is so overwhelmed with the glorious salvation that he has in Jesus Christ that he is burning with zeal to demonstrate his love and thankfulness.

Secondly, Christ Jesus forms a people for good works in his church. In his church. Christ died for the elect and then in time he brings them into the church and there he brings them under the preaching of the Gospel and he works faith in his people in the church, and it's only when we are a living member of the congregation, when we are under the preaching of the Gospel and taking hold of that week after week, that we will be zealous for good works. You can see why because the preaching every week is saying you are a sinner but you are saved by grace. It's holding up Jesus Christ to us, displaying him crucified week after week so that we leave thankful, eager to show our love for him.

What a blessed people. What a blessed people. I want to point out three things that will show the blessings of a people who are zealous for good works. Three ways. I'm sure you

can come up with more but let's just consider three. In the first place, they are blessed because they are Christ's possession. They belong to him. They are, says the text, a peculiar people. He didn't die for everyone, he died for a specific people, a particular people. That's the idea of peculiar. They are a specific particular people who can say, "Christ died for me."

That's just an amazing thing. Paul writing to the Galatians confesses his faith in Jesus Christ and then he says, "who loved me and gave himself for me." Can you say that? Isn't that a thrill to be able to say, "Jesus loved me and gave himself for me. I belong to him. That's my hope day after day." No matter what happens to him, "That's my comfort in life and in all of my sorrows. It's my only hope in my deepest despair. When everything seems to be against me, I know he loves me. I know he gave himself for me." And the fact even that there are good works in our lives testifies to that. Only God's people, only that particular people purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ produce good works.

That in the first place we belong to Jesus, secondly, we are a part of the body of Jesus Christ. We are living members of the church. Look around the congregation, what makes this congregation? It is not that we are all identical. It's not that we all have exactly the same interests. We are not all from one blood family. That's not what brings us together as a congregation. We are part of one body because Jesus brings us together. We are all different, we all have our place, we all have our function, and the place and functions that God has given to each one of us is that we may serve the rest of the body. That's what good works to. Most of the good works that a child of God produces in this life are serving the other members of the church. That's what our desire is, to be able to serve each other. What a blessing when the church is doing that, when we are serving each other, and God is giving us grace evermore to serve each other in that way. We are part of a body. We live out of the body. We serve the body. What a blessing. We are not our own. Jesus owns us, but we are not on our own in this life, we are part of a body that demonstrates the love of Jesus Christ.

We belong to him, we are part of the body, thirdly, the blessing of this people is the joy of knowing the Lord's approval. Knowing the Lord's approval. When we are fruitful in the body, when our lives are showing thankfulness to God, when our lives are demonstrating love for God and love for the neighbor, God approves of that. He approves because he delights in seeing his work of grace come into fruition in our lives. He delights in his own work. That approval means more than anything to a child of God. As a little child looks up expectantly at dad or mom when he has done something that he has been told to do and wants the approval of mom and dad, so does the believer behold, look up to heaven and desire to have the approval of God upon his life. And God gives it and that gives us tremendous confidence as we face the end. That approval that we experience already now, approval that comes in God giving us more grace, not that he makes our life to be easy, that's not how he gives his approval, but by giving us more grace than we had before. We experience God's approval and someone who experiences that in this life when he approaches death doesn't have to worry, then, "What will happen when I die?" He knows he's approved of God.

Then, in fact, the parable in Matthew 25, it speaks of the judgment where Christ publicly approves of his people. Listen, a very well-known parable. Then the king shall say unto them on his right hand, after dismissing goats on the left, the king will say unto them on his right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when," when did we do any of these things? When did we see you naked? When did we see you hungry? When did we do any of these things? You know the answer, "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."

Now the point is not, we all know that, the point is not that we earned our way into heaven by doing good works. The point is emphatically not that. We all know that. And the point is not that somehow our good works have made us a little bit righteous and that's part of it. Absolutely not. That's not the point. The point is this: this is how Jesus' peculiar people live. Jesus knows his own, he purchased them, but he can also say, "I recognize you. I recognize you as my people because this is the way you lived, a people zealous for good works." That's the point.

So you see our calling: live out of the cross, live a life of thanksgiving. That's the will of Jesus Christ who redeemed us that we would be a people zealous for good works. Amen.

Let us pray.

*Father in heaven, we thank thee for thy goodness to us. What a glorious salvation we have in Jesus Christ. Lord, we pray, apply this word to us and make us to be a people who are so filled with love and thankfulness to thee that our lives are in constant testimony through the good works that we live out of thy power and thy glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*