

Good, But Not THAT Good

Breaking the Bonds of Legalism

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sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Sunday, May 13, 2018

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Sometimes we need to remember the most basic of principles in order to orient our thinking properly and some basic principles from God's word set the course for your entire life and your entire way of thinking and your entire manner of existence. As a non-Christian, as a Christian, those things inevitably hold true. Let's just reduce it to one basic principle: we are all sinners who need Christ. We are all sinners who need Christ. You are a sinner who needs Christ and so am I and to frame it with that simplicity and that clarity serves a very great purpose. There are two great spiritual dangers among others I suppose, but two great spiritual dangers that we are all subject to and which can particularly mark those, I suppose, that attend a Bible teaching church. That's why this matters to me. We are a Bible teaching church and you attend here. On the one hand when you say we are sinners who need Christ, on the first part of that is a deathblow to your pride. You are a sinner. You fall short of the glory of God. You stumble in many ways. For those who know the Bible, who know Christ, who understand what God has said in his word, it drives out human pride; it drives out a sense of entitlement; it drives out a sense of being better than someone else. You're a sinner, we're sinners and that humbles us and keeps us from an attitude of pride and self-sufficiency and arrogance when we keep that very simple thought in mind that is testified to so often in Scripture. The hearts of men are filled with insanity all the days of their lives, 1 Kings says.

So we're sinners and our pride is punctured by that, our balloon is popped and there is not room for a sense of pride but when you add to that we are sinners who need Christ, there is something that balances that out very beautifully on the other side. Because God has provided his Son to be the Savior of sinners and because Christ is willing to save all who come to him, therefore while we are evacuated of pride there is also never cause for despair. There is always a positive dimension of hope for those who hold those two principles in their mind, who hold those two convictions in pride. "Yes, I'm a sinner and I am humbled by the reality of the magnificent ways in which I fall short of the glory of God and I am not worthy of his grace, I'm not worthy of his kingdom. I am worthy of death and judgment and destruction. That's true but I'm not in despair as a result of that because I remember that God has provided a Savior." There is given this day for us a Savior who is Christ the Lord and that in Christ we have one who is a dispenser of grace, a dispenser of love, a dispenser of mercy, of goodness and mercy to unworthy sinners, and to be a sinner who sees Christ is to be someone who is humbled and simultaneously given hope. To reject Christ is to sentence yourself to despair. To think only of your sin is

to sentence yourself to despair. To refuse to acknowledge your sin is to condemn yourself to destruction because you are a sinner whether you admit it or not.

So the reality of sin and the reality of grace found only in the Lord Jesus Christ gives us the direction. It lays a road, it lays a pathway forward when we hold those convictions under the word of God and these things are vital. They have been running through my mind for so many weeks and months now and we are in the middle of a series on legalism, what we've called "Breaking the Bonds of Legalism," and I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment. But here is the thing, you know, Scripture says that knowledge puffs up but love edifies. Knowledge puffs up but love edifies. I'm mindful as we develop and continue to build a Bible teaching church here, I'm grateful to have so many, to have hundreds of people around us that share a conviction that want the word of God taught, that want to hear it, that want to obey it, that want to believe it. I'm very grateful for that but I would be a fool as a pastor not to recognize what Scripture says about the dangers of knowledge, that knowledge can lead us to pride. It can puff us up if we're not balanced in our thinking about things. It doesn't matter if we're the greatest apologist in the world if we are a proud and boastful, arrogant man in the process. That doesn't help. That is a disfigurement of the Gospel. It doesn't matter if we are outwardly moral if inwardly we are puffed up thinking that we are better than those that are around us and we cannot go there, we cannot think that way because we are sinners and the best of us fall short of the glory of God. The best of us find that our righteousness is as filthy rags. The best of us stumble in many ways.

This is just basic Bible teaching but the challenge for us is for that to sink into the way that we actually think about God and think about ourselves. It is easy to hold these truths in one side of your brain and yet in the other side of the brain to not make the connection that says, "Oh, this affects the way that I view myself. This affects the way that I think about others. It affects the way that I think about Christ." And Scripture warns us, tells us, you know, that it's impossible for us to go and humble another man's pride, and one of the reasons we teach God's word is we believe that it has the power to pierce the human heart, to expose the thoughts and intentions of the heart in a way that all kinds of arguments never could do. I could give you a lengthy apologetic lecture and you would walk out unchanged but when we come to God's word, we find things that diagnose us, that hold a spiritual mirror up to our eyes, up to the eyes of our hearts and we say, "Oh, I'm a sinner." And my pride is crushed and humbled by that, and yet in my place of humility, in my place of conviction, I look up and I see Christ and I see him crucified and risen and ascended to the right hand of God to be the representative of sinners, to save them in love and that I can rely on him as our youth choir sang so beautifully, I can rely on him to hold me fast even though my life in itself is not worthy of him to do that even as a believer. Now, so keep those things in mind.

One of the great challenges that I'm finding in this series is to try to keep things in balance as we go along, the starting point I think in dealing with legalism is to recognize what the Gospel is and what it is not; to realize that man in his rebellion against God is on the receiving end of grace; that God in grace, in love, in mercy, in patience, in goodness, sent Christ to be the Savior of sinners just like you; and we realize that we relate to God

not on the basis of our personal merit, that we do not approach him on the basis of a life that is righteous enough to merit his attention, we come as those who fall short of the glory of God and trust in the mercy of one outside of us, we trust in the righteousness of one outside of us to be our access to God, and that mercy and righteousness is found in Christ alone.

Last time, we tried our best to put obedience in its place in our series on legalism, to tell people that they are sinners that cannot earn the favor of God. To tell you as a Christian that you are a sinner that falls short of the glory of God is to say this, it is to say that your good works cannot earn salvation. Forget about it. That does not happen. There will be no one in heaven who boasts about the fact that they earned their way there. This is so fundamental to existence and yet we said that when God saves a man, he changes the man, he imparts a new nature to the man, he declares that man righteous before the law court of God, that man is declared righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ credited to his account, a free gift from God given to him and received by faith. So we cannot earn our salvation but what we saw last time was that Christians will obey. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Ephesians 2:10 says that, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Beloved, I'm not sorry that I'm repeating basic things here. Repetition is the key to learning. Jesus Christ, speaking to you as though you are Christians, Jesus Christ did not save you because were good, he saved you despite the fact that you were sinful, but he saved you in part to cleanse you so that you would become an obedient disciple of his. He saved you not only from the penalty of sin and death and hell, he broke the power of sin so that you would live a life that is increasingly conformed to his image so that you would reflect his glory as you live during your 70 years here on earth, and what we want to talk about today is the nature of the good works of the Christian life. We're actually going to break this into two parts. I had this in one message and the cup isn't big enough to pour this much water into it so we're going to do it over two messages.

Now I want to define some terms. I want to define some terms to help us think rightly and so it's very clear what I'm saying and what I'm not saying here. What do we mean when we say good works? Well, let me preface by saying that an unsaved man is completely incapable of doing works that are good in the sight of God. You cannot do any good work in the sight of God if your mind is hostile toward him; in your nature that Romans 8 says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. So when we talk about good works, we're not even talking about unregenerate men, unsaved men. Their lives are sinful because their lives and what they do flow out of a disposition of hostility toward God. Before you can do any good work, you must first be reconciled to God in the deepest recesses of your heart and that only comes through a saving work of Christ and putting your faith in him. So we're not talking about good works from the perspective of an unsaved man. That's a contradiction in terms.

You know, a man can do things that have some measure of civic good, man-to-man philanthropy, let's not slip for a moment and think that somehow that earns merit with God; that that puts God under obligation; that the favor of God can be bought by what he

does. Perish the thought. No, when we're talking about good works, here's what we mean: good works are those acts done in faith by Christians. Good works are those acts done in faith by Christians in obedience to God's word that are motivated by love for God and the desire to see Christ glorified. Every clause in that is essential. Good works as God sees them can only be done by Christians because only Christians are reconciled to a holy God. They are those things that are done with an eye of faith, with an eye toward Christ; that are done believing in Christ and with a desire to please him. They are deeds that are in conformity with what God has revealed in his word. We don't make up our own independent list of what we consider to be good and then offer that to God. "I don't dance. I don't drink. I don't chew and I don't go with girls who do." That kind of mindset that establishes a list of rules outside of Scripture is worthless because it is not in accordance with the revelation of God. It is the doctrines and precepts of men rather than the doctrines and teaching of God's word and so when we talk about good works, we're talking about things that God has revealed that please him in Scripture, not what we make up as our own external standards of morality. They are motivated by love for God, the desire to see Christ glorified, and the mindset is this, "God, I am a sinner who needs Christ and do you know what? You have given Christ to me. You have blessed me in Christ. You have drawn me to Christ and now I belong to him by faith. I'm a member of your family and I love you for it. I am so grateful, O God, that you saved me and now I want my life to be a reflection of love for you, and as Christ said, I will reflect my love in my obedience to your word." That's the idea of good works.

You see, when we talk about good works – these things are so fundamental – we are not talking about man-centered rules as if I keep these rules externally, then what's going on in my heart doesn't really matter and it's something that isn't really necessary for Christ to be a part of. That's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is a Christ-centered faith that looks vertically, that sees that God has saved me, that God has been merciful to me, and out of a sense of gratitude and love for him to see him glorified, I want my life to be a reflection of his character. A reflection, a mirror as dusty and smeared as it might be by my lingering sin, I still want my life to reflect something of the glory of Christ. Do you know those emotions in your heart? Do you know something about those affections in your heart? Because they are there for every true Christian and out of a love for Christ we go to his word and say, "Oh, this is how I am to live. This is how God's moral law directs me. This is my pattern for life," and I conform it accordingly. You see, beloved, good works like that are one of the primary purposes of salvation. The heart, your heart is so captivated by the glory and grace of the God who saved you that all you can do in response and what you want to do is to give your life back to him. He saved you from sin and you say, "I am so grateful. I have to live for him too. Not to earn his favor. I am a sinner, I can't earn his favor by what I do, but oh, do I want to live for him; oh, do I want to please him because never has anyone loved me like Christ loved me at the cross, never has anyone given to me a love like Christ has given to me and," you say, "I want to respond like that. I want to respond to him. I want to please him and he has shown me in his word what pleases him."

Now, that's the spirit of it. Scripture abounds with illustrations of good works. You know, you can use this phrase and it's a little bit frustrating with some of the theologies that you

read, they don't illustrate what they are saying, but Scripture abounds with illustrations of what it calls good works for believers to do. I just chose three at random just to give you a sense of what we're talking about. Jesus said in Matthew 10, "Whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward." A simple act of mercy done to another believer in the name of Christ, God looks at that and says, "That's what I have in mind." A simple act of mercy. It's not the kind of perverse self-flagellation that Catholics will do in other countries to beat themselves to try to atone for their sins. That's not a good work, that's a satanic deception. There is nothing meritorious in that at all. Scripture says in James 1, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep one's self unstained by the world." The simplicity of extending your life in care to those who are vulnerable in the name of Christ saying, "God's word says that this is a good thing. I see that. I want to please God. I see this vulnerable person and I want to give myself to them." Pure and undefiled, Scripture says. 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Going to God's word, applying your mind to it to understand it, to interpret it rightly, to speak about it rightly, and we could multiply it, Romans 12, different things that you could look at. The key for what we're saying here this morning is that these are deeds that are done by Christians in response to God's word motivated by love for Christ and the desire to see God glorified. The Bible says that God approves such works and that he will reward them; that there will come a time where we stand before him and we receive an eternal reward and he will reward us for the good works that were done by us as Christians. So the possibility of good works exists for those of us who know Christ.

That's all by way of introduction. Now I want to get to what we're going to focus on here today. One of the things that we really need to do as Christians, as a church, is to keep the concept of good works in perspective lest we fall into a sense of legalistic pride. "Look at what I'm doing. I'm better. I'm good in and of myself." Keep them in perspective lest as individuals in our lives and in conformity to some kind of outward morality we fall into a legalistic sense of entitlement over our behavior. And you would never say this verbally, you would just have it echoing in your mind as an expectation, "You know, God, I'm doing pretty good here. God kind of owes me." As I've said in the past recently, where that gets exposed is when trials hit you that you did not want, that you were not anticipating and all of a sudden life is very difficult and your legalistic mind exposes itself. The pressure of trials causes some lingering legalism in your heart to spurt out and you can recognize it when you think and when you say, "What did I do to deserve this?" As if your behavior was going to determine and limit and restrict the nature of what God would do in your life; that God is obligated to respond to you because you have behaved in a particular way.

Beloved, speaking to you now as Christians in the context of warning against this sense of pride: your works are good as a Christian but they are not that good. In fact, that's the title of the message, "Good, But Not THAT Good," and I want to explain what we mean by that. A right view of good works will keep you from that sense of legalistic pride. A right view of good works will also protect those on the other end of the spectrum. It will

protect a soft heart, a tender heart from despair. You see, and we have lots of people like this in our church, thoughtful believers who are very sensitive to sin, sensitive to their failures. Their sin bothers them. It weighs on them and he knows that his life is flawed, he knows that there is sin in his life, that it hasn't yet been exterminated, and when you speak to him about good works, he knows his works aren't that good. He realizes that there are flaws in it. A proper view of good works will guard us from both extremes, guard us from a sense of pride, guard us from a sense of despair. We are sinners and therefore we are mindful that we are not proud. We have Christ and therefore we are not in despair and a proper view of good works will guard us from both of those extremes.

When I say your works, your good works as a Christian are not that good, what do I mean, because Scripture speaks about good works, what do I mean when I say they are not that good? Here's what I mean. Again, we're defining terms. A Christian's good works are not meritorious. That's a really important word. They are not meritorious. Our good works, your good works are not enough to obligate God to you in response. Standing alone, standing is something that you yourself have done, your good works merit nothing from God and I'm going to spend the next two weeks proving that point to you. When you hear that for the first time, it may sound really stark to your ears. You say, "Wait, this sounds new," but these are things that are woven into the great confessions of the Christian church. This is what good Christians have been saying from God's word for hundreds of years. We're not saying anything new here today.

When we say a Christian's good works are not meritorious, let me be a little more technical here. The theologian Louis Berkhof says this, "When we speak of good works in connection with sanctification, we do not refer to works that are perfect, that answer perfectly to the requirements of the divine moral law and that are of such inherent worth as to entitle one to the reward of eternal life." Let me say this again. Beloved, if you don't see it now, trust me, we're talking about something that is absolutely essential here and has great ramifications for your spiritual life henceforth going forward. So I will repeat the definition and add to it with something else he said. "When we speak of good works in connection with sanctification, we do not refer to works that are perfect, that answer perfectly to the requirements of the divine moral law and that are of such inherent worth as to entitle one to the reward of eternal life." What he's saying is that there is nothing that we do that is so good that it entitles us to eternal life. That's not the nature of Christian good works. They are not that good. They are comparatively good, they are relatively good, they are pleasing in God's sight, but strictly judged, absolutely judged, they are not worthy to the glory that is going to be revealed to us. Berkhof goes on and says, "The good works of believers do not by their own intrinsic value make God a debtor to those who perform them. In strict justice, the good works of believers merit nothing."

Now, let's unpack that. You may not believe it at the moment but there is a wonderful liberty wrapped up in what I just said to you. There is a wonderful freedom wrapped up in what you have just heard and if you think biblically, you will see that this must be the case, that our good works do not make God our debtor. They do not put God in a position where he owes us something. That could never be the case as we will see.

They do not put us in a position where we could offer a perfect good work to God and let me show that to you with a simple illustration. Even if, you could never give God a perfect work that was not flawed, you could never give him something that was not subject to being flawed, so let me give you a perfect example. Let's say that you are walking along and you come across a believer who is struggling, you realize there is a financial need and you can meet it. You realize that Scripture talks about ministering to those who are in need within the body of Christ and you ascertain the need and you give them what they need. You give them a couple of hundred bucks. You fix their car or whatever it is and you're saying, "I'm doing this because I love Christ. I'm doing this to minister to them in the name of Christ. With my eye on Christ, I want to do this to the glory of God and it delights my heart to do this." And even if you were doing it with perfect motives, you do it, you go out and you do that and you could say, "Yeah, that's a good work." And then, is that a perfect work? Well, think about it this way, think about it this way and see how subject to sin the best of what we do is. Five minutes later after having done that good work, you meet a friend and say, "Hey, you want to hear what I just did? Do you know what I just did? So-and-so had this need and I gave them \$200 and I fixed their car and I feel really good about it," and all of a sudden you have violated Matthew 6, keep your righteousness quiet before men, and even if that prior work was perfect, you went out and defiled it by your boastful attitude. We are subject to sin in so many ways. What we do is so prone to being flawed.

Biblical obedience is important. We saw that last time. I'm not going to repeat it here today, but what we're saying here today is something different. What we're saying is that your obedience to God, your good works as a Christian, lack the intrinsic value to obligate God to you; to force his hand so that he must deal with you in a particular way. Job was blameless and God allowed Satan to sift him. It doesn't work on that legalistic principle. We're going to spend two weeks on this point so stay with me. How can we say that your good works do not obligate God? Well, let's start here with point 1. Point 1: your good works do not merit the pardon of your sin. Your good works do not merit the pardon of your sin. We started with these two principles: we are sinners in need of Christ. To say that we are sinners is to say that we fall short of the glory of God, that we do not measure up to his standard, and even as believers though we have been declared righteous as a practical matter, there is still remaining sin that needs to be purged out of our lives. So beloved, when you sin, you cannot offset your sin with a good work. You can't go out and cancel out the debt of sins as a believer by doing good works as a Christian. That's what we mean by that. Your works may be good but they are not that good. They don't cancel the debt of sin. And when we say a work merits pardon of sin, what we mean is this: is that the good work brings God into the believer's debt; that a good work somehow makes it so that God must pardon your sin in response to the good work. It doesn't work that way. Your works may be good, they may be pleasing to God, but they are not that good. They don't obligate him to forgive sin. They are not the basis upon which God forgives your sin.

Our works, beloved, if we are honest with ourselves, if we are honest in the light of God's word, our works are never perfect, are they? If nothing else, if nothing else they can be done with a mixture of motives. For example, I can preach to the best of my heart's desire

to the glory of God, preach in response to my salvation, preach in response to the word, preach because the word says preach the word, and do that, but in the act of preaching have unworthy thoughts, in the act of preaching have mixed motives saying, "Boy, I hope they like what I'm saying," have a man-ward focus on what should be a vertical aspect of worship to God alone, so that even while it is good and done in faith and done by response to the word of God, it's still flawed. That's true of all of us, that if nothing else, and there is a lot more, if nothing else the problem of mixed motives, of doing things externally without our hearts fully engaged, leave it so that they are not absolutely perfect, not with absolutely perfect motives.

Let me remind you of something, beloved. What we're doing here is we're just kind of working out the implications of what we already believe. Let me remind you of something as we talk about this point, your good works do not merit pardon from God. Beloved, please remember, please remember that the teaching of Scripture is that God did not pardon your sin because of something in you. God pardoned your sin for the sake of Christ. He pardoned your sin for the sake of his shed blood. 1 John 1:7, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." We are immediately humbled by that. We are immediately brought to a recognition that nothing I could do could compare to the infinite merit of a single drop of the immaculate blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing I do compares to the innocence and the infinite value, the infinite righteousness of the blood that was shed for my salvation. So you think about your good works in the context from the perspective of what really cleansed my sin, the eternal Son of God becoming Incarnate 2,000 years ago, going to the cross and voluntarily giving up his life, shedding his blood, bearing the wrath, going to the grave. My little piddly act in time and space for my imperfect life doesn't merit the pardon of sin. What brings the pardon of sin is an act of infinite righteousness, of infinite grace, by an infinite glorious Son of God and nothing I do compares to that. There may be a place where my works could be called good in a comparative sense but whatever else you say about your works, they're not that good. They're not as good as the blood of Christ and it is only the blood of Christ that washes away sin. So you think about these things and you realize, "Okay, I'm pleased to serve God. I'm glad to do good works but I realize there is a limit to how good it is, and even at my best there is an infinite gulf between what I do and the precious blood of Christ."

You are a sinner. You cannot work off the debt of sin by what you do. Christian, your works may be good as a Christian, but they are not that good. They are not that good. At our hypothetical best, you can approach this from another way, turn to the Gospel of Luke 17:9 and 10, and as a preface to this, let's just remember that we have life only because God gave it to us. We have physical life only because God imparted it to us. We have spiritual life if we are Christians and only if we are Christians, and we have it only because God imparted that life to us as well. In grace he saved us. He gave us life and then he saved us and what does that require? By right of creation, by right of redemption, we owe God our all. We would not exist apart from him. We would not be saved apart from Christ. So in verse 10 of Luke 17, Jesus said, "when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'" "God, even when I did my best, even when I maxed out my effort for the Gospel of Christ, maxed out my life for the glory of Christ, did everything that was called

for, the best that I could say that was just my duty to do that. After receiving the gift of physical life, after receiving the gift of spiritual life, being completely on the receiving end, what have I given, Lord, except what you first gave to me? If I give you an act of strength as my obedience in this day, what am I doing it except from strength that you have already first supplied to me?" I don't mind being personal. If I teach the word of God and if I teach it rightly, if I teach it in the proper spirit, what have I done except to use a mind that God has given me to explain a word that he gave to the world? How does that make me somehow the creditor and God the debtor? How does that make God the one who owes me? It doesn't work that way.

So we have to think fundamentally about where we stand in the order of creation and where we stand in the order of salvation. "God, if you have saved me, then anything that I can do is only a response to what you have already first done. I serve you from the strength which Christ supplies. If I speak truth, it's not anything that I came up with, it was your truth, your revelation." And why am I so animated about this? Why do I get so exercised about this? Because right here is the dividing line between humility and pride. We look and we say, "Look what I did," and puff up over it because we forget we're sinners or come to a place of renewed humility that says, "Christ is all that matters. Christ is the one who is glorified. Christ is the only one whose glory matters here. I'm an unworthy slave. I'm a sinner saved by grace, nothing more."

It's no secret that I'm a lover of Martin Lloyd-Jones even though he's been gone for 37 years now, and at the end of his 50-some years of ministry, many years, 30 years at Westminster Chapel in London, at the end of his life he is talking with his biographer, Ian Murray, this is recorded in the two-volume biography, and they are talking looking back over his life. He was ill. Life didn't hold out much more time. This great man so greatly used by God whose works are more influential now than they were while he was alive, this man who had preached without compromise for decades, been sought around the world for his counsel and his teaching, comes to the end of his life, looks at his former assistant, the writer of his biography, and says, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace."

That's the spirit. Nothing that a sinner could offer to God in response would compensate for the guilt of sin. Nothing that the sinner could offer to God could merit eternal life. We can't offset one sin by doing something good. I remember as a teenager having been very naughty on Saturday night, showed up at church on Sunday and someone commented, "Ah, I'm surprised to see you." I said, "Yeah, I had to make up for what I did last night." That was my mindset. Sin one night, go to church, it balances out, you're still okay. No. That's not it. One writer said this, hear me, beloved, this is the heart, this is the vibrating heart, this is the pulsating heart of experimental experiential Christianity: believers owe their whole life to God and therefore cannot merit anything by giving God simply what is his due. I'll say it again. I don't mind repeating myself here. Believers owe their whole life to God and therefore cannot merit anything by giving God simply what is his due. Do you see that? Do you understand that? Is that woven into your self-perception?

You can take it another step. You think about it this way, Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing." Even when you are doing good works in the name of Christ to the glory

of Christ, doing it by faith, you're doing it by strength that he has given you, you're doing it the power of an indwelling Holy Spirit that Christ has given to you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine, so you cannot bear fruit apart from Christ. So if there is any fruit to my ministry, if there is anything good that comes out of it, I look at that and I say, "But that's only because of what Christ was doing in a hidden unseen way. It couldn't have been me, believe me." No matter what we do in the best of our efforts, we're just giving what's due, and if we're giving what's due, we're giving it by a strength that is supplied to us by Christ. There is no merit in that that accrues to our account independently of Christ. There is no obligation to God to reward that. If the help of Christ was necessary, we cannot claim independent merit to what we have done. The testimony of these things, the testimony of my pulpit, the testimony of any Christian seeking to serve Christ is, "I was not good enough on my own. I was not strong enough on my own. If something happened good as a result, all praise and glory to Christ because it could have only been his strength. It was his word. It was his grace that saved me in the first place."

You can see this illustrated, turn to Revelation 4. I had two points today, I'm only going to finish this one. The spirit of what we are talking about is that if there is anything good that comes out of our lives as Christians, we quickly run to give Christ the glory for it. Not to put our name up in lights. Not to put our name on the sign. Heaven forbid. Heaven forbid that as a Christian there would be some desire within us that grasps after glory for ourselves rather than the one who gave us life both physical and spiritual. God forbid. And you see the spirit of this in Revelation 4, "when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne," taking the reward that God had given them and rather than keeping it to themselves, they fling it like a frisbee at the feet of Jesus and say, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." God, you rewarded me, my immediate response is to throw it back to Christ, to give it to him because without Christ, apart from Christ, there would be nothing to merit. There would be nothing to reward. Lord, I was all along just a sinner in need of Christ and in love, mercy, grace, patience and goodness, my God, you gave him to me. You sent him. And not only do I not keep any of the glory, God, I gladly surrender it to the one who gave his all for me. No merit of my own, his anger to suppress. My only hope is found in Jesus' blood and righteousness.

So we offer God a life of obedience, yes, absolutely but we realize when it is all said and done, my obedience merits nothing from God. My obedience comes if it comes at all, it comes through the strength of Christ and its to his glory and when I have done my best, God, all I've done is done what I should have done to begin with, is to live my life for you.

Let's bow together in prayer.

God, we offer ourselves to you. We offer our works to you, not from pride but by faith in Christ. Father, we trust that as we offer our lives and what we do to you, we offer it through Christ, we offer it in connection with him, we offer it in his name, Father, and trust that in his name you would receive it as something pleasing in your sight. Father, accept us, accept what we do not because of its intrinsic merit, Father, because at its best it's flawed and imperfect and sinful but, Father, rather accept us for the sake of Christ, accept us in what we do in Christ and for his sake. Father, you accepted us in the first place at the moment of our conversion, you accepted us for the sake of Christ, you accepted us based on a perfect righteousness that was not our own, now Father, through that same great High Priest, that same great Savior, through our matchless Lord, in the name of his blood, we offer our lives to you. We offer them through our Lord Jesus Christ and trust that in him, Father, somehow you would be pleased to accept our living sacrifice and that you would be pleased to use what we do to bring glory and honor to the name of the one who saved our souls. Father, keep us from that awful spirit of legalism that glories in a self-made righteousness based on rules that you never commanded, Father, which is just vanity in worship and self-deceit. Let us ever live for the one who gave himself for us, who loved us and gave himself up for us and revealed what pleases you in your word. We ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

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