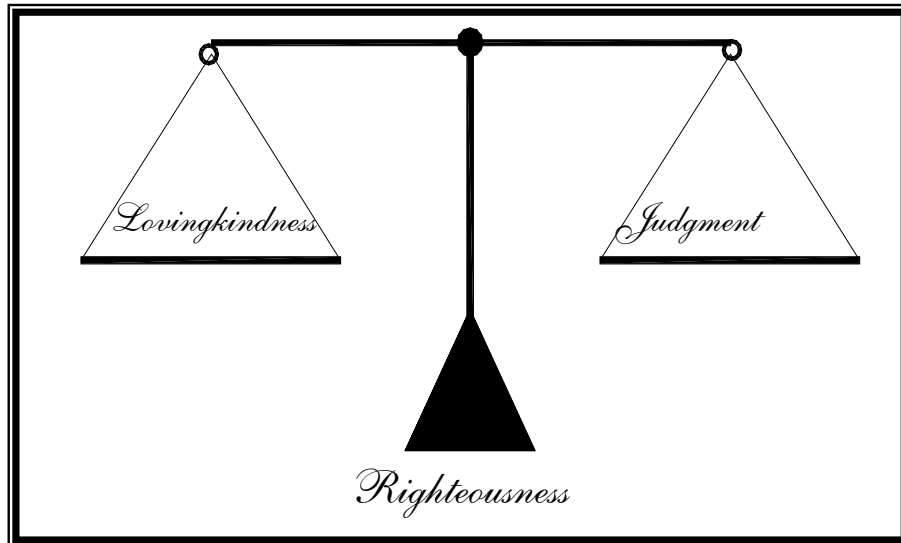


Regarding:

Good Works



“The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD,
And He delights in his way.” *Psalm 37:23*

Regarding:
Good Works

**A Biblical study of Christian
“Good Works”**



**(Gk. *Kalos*) – “Inherently”
Good Works
&
(Gk. *Agathos*) – “Benevolently”
Good Works**

**With an addendum on
“Spiritual work”**

Regarding: Good Works

Introduction

One warm summer day while driving on an interstate highway I noticed a woman in a car pulled off on the side of the road. She had a flat tire. Almost without thought I pulled over and changed the tire for her and was quickly on my way again. It was a small good deed for me, and very helpful for the woman in distress. Afterwards, I felt good about it. There is just something about helping others out in their time of need that brings an inward satisfaction. My reaction was not necessarily that of being a Christian. I was brought up this way from childhood and being there to lend a hand has always been part of my make-up. There also seemed to be an unspoken priority of importance, that is, family first, then neighbors, then strangers, i.e., most any stranger in need.

The other day I read in our local newspaper of a local church offering free oil changes to anyone in the community. They just wanted to do something nice. The article quoted the pastor as saying that, "It is an opportunity to use our God-given talents as ministries in a helpful way." Is this good works? Definitely. Is it Christian? Not necessarily. Two of the most hospitable and gracious people I ever met were a Muslim couple I had met in graduate school. Was this a "God given ministry?" Certainly not. Most anyone can be trained to drain oil from a car and to change its oil filter.

What's the point?

A young Christian man, Paul, recently shared with me his enthusiasm for doing something good and helpful. He volunteered for a few weeks of *community service* in which he spent day after day hanging drywall in construction of a home. When his work was over he asked himself, "**What's the point?**" He had no chance to witness his faith, share the good news of the Gospel, or bring any kind of testimony to Christ. Even though he did something good, he felt it was incomplete.

So, what are Christian works? Everyone 'should' respond to another in need, almost without hesitation - kind of a 'good Samaritan' response to a crisis. Vivid examples of such responses to human misery lie in recent destructions caused by the tsunami in Indonesia and India and hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and Alabama.

It is not the intent here to malign such great acts of kindness, rather to encourage it. But is there an imperceptible blending of *Christian works* and *civic duty* ... a mixing of *spiritual service* with *social service*? Do deeds like driving home a drunk, shoveling a neighbor's sidewalk, helping to build a house for some undefined poor person, planting flowers in a downtown area, helping to clean up a stream or highway litter classify as *Christian good works*? Does providing free coffee in a dormitory during finals week or at a roadside rest for holiday travelers, participating in a blood drive, and yes, stopping to help fix a flat tire or hang drywall all classify as *Christian good works*? For sure, they are all good deeds and certainly beneficial to others. But they are certainly not only *Christian* good works, for those of all

beliefs may be equally involved in such acts of kindness. Is not the Biblical emphasis for a believer to depart from 'dead works' and to do 'good works' something beyond these acts of kindness?

Sometimes I think I can hear the enemy of the Church of our Lord say, **"If I can just distract these people, these believers, to occupy their time, give of their resources and their energies with seemingly 'good' causes then I will have weakened this potentially mighty force of Christ in the earth. I will play on their emotions, on their logic, and on their pride, and they will go to great lengths to labor and give of their resources and themselves to causes that will not weaken my kingdom. And they will feel good about it! After all, if all those hours and all those resources were totally devoted to the direct expansion and building up of the Kingdom of God, it would cause me and my kingdom great harm."**

Dogma

The concept of *works* is recognized as a part of the Christian walk by most every Christian denomination. Some believe that one's salvation is gained, or lost, according to good works. Some believe salvation is gained by grace, through faith in Christ, but is secured by good works. Others believe in salvation by grace, but it must be completed by works that cannot be fully satisfied while on this earth. The believer may have to spend a period of time in eternity in a realm termed "Purgatory" until a penalty is paid for a lack of good works. Still others believe in salvation by grace, and added blessings and honors, or loss thereof, is due to good works. Thus confusion and division is brought to the body of Christ over such dogma.

What if?

What if the Lord Himself gave to you 10 *talents*? Let's say that 4 of those *talents* were actually monetary, 4 *talents* consisted of a 'time' allotment, and 2 *talents* were of additional exceptional abilities (spiritual or natural) to have in your possession. Imagine that the Lord's final charge to you was to invest these *talents* into the growth and development of His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God alone; and not to waste a single talent but to maximize the return on His investment in you towards His work. How would you invest these *talents*? To what works, what causes, what ministries, what helps would you focus all your *talents*? This "what if" scenario is actually real and is a very sober consideration for every believer in Christ. Jesus said, "As You (the Father) sent Me into the world, I also have sent them (the disciples) into the world." *Jn. 17:18* Jesus was not of the world but was sent into the world for the purpose of establishing the Kingdom of God in the hearts of the people. So too the believer is no longer of the world but now actually belongs to a different (and distant) kingdom, extraneous to the world.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." *Phil. 3:20*

"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love." *Col. 1:13*

Foundational principles of the Kingdom

Our focus, the very thrust of our lives, is towards this kingdom. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” *Jn. 17:16*. However, as the Christ came into the world from the Kingdom of God to fulfill the purpose of His Father, He now sends the believer into the world for the sake of the Gospel: “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” *Jn. 17:18*. Following His resurrection into His new and glorified body, Jesus appeared to His disciples and commissioned them:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [...]” *Mt. 28:19*

The commission is made as well to Saul (soon to become Paul):

“I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” *Acts 26:17-18*.

The Kingdom of God is that which finds its origin not in the world, but in the realm of the Spirit of God. It is foreign to this world. Its ways are different to this world. Concepts like righteousness, peace, joy, life, holiness, oneness, and goodness do not hold the same meaning or value as their counterpart concepts of the world. Neither do concepts like tolerance, judgment, unity, and acceptance. The Christian view of these concepts and the world’s view are at odds with one another. Nor are the Kingdom of God’s government, authority, and citizenship similar to that of the world. Those of the Kingdom of God are thus different and “set apart” from the world, and while being a physical part of the world, their interaction with the world is spiritual and moral. Their life’s pursuits are limited to the commissioned only to go or enter into the world for the sole purpose of advancing and manifesting the Kingdom of God, at the expense and demise of the Kingdom of Darkness. More will be said on this matter later in this message.

Not All Blue Berries are Blueberries – A study in word definition.

I do hope this heading is not confusing, but it is another way of saying, “not all ‘good’ *works* are actually *good works* – in a Biblical sense.” Before delving into the discussion of Christian *good works*, or at least the Biblical references to *good works*, it is best to begin with some simple definitions for the word *good*. Oftentimes Bible interpreters fail to make a finer distinction between the translation of certain Greek words. For instance, the words commonly translated as *love, know, word, life* and *good* are each represented by more than one word in the original Greek, and therefore each word has more than one meaning, which can be sometimes quite different. Thus care must be taken when interpreting selective Bible passages. The word commonly translated *good* as in *good works* actually comes from two different Greek words, *kalos* and *agathos*.

Good (Gk. *Kalos*, inherent) Works

The first word for ‘good’ *kalos*, is used in the following verse:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good (*kalos*) works and glorify your Father in heaven.” *Mt. 5:16*

This Greek word *kalos* primarily means to be inherently or constitutionally (inward, of the heart) good without necessarily meaning outwardly benevolent to others. It is good in a moral sense, virtuous. Therefore a more correct interpretation of this verse implies **character**. As the *light* in Christ was manifested to the world, may the Christ-like nature be so manifested in the believer. This verse needn't imply doing many good deeds or acts of benevolence to others as often interpreted. Some further examples:

“And let us not grow weary while doing good (*kalos*), for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” *Gal. 6:9*

“...in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good (*kalos*) works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, [...]” *Titus 2:7*

“...who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good (*kalos*) works.” *Titus 2:14*

These kinds of good (*kalos*) works are, in a sense, beneficial to others - even non-believers. Others may see the Christ-like nature of the believer and thereby “*glorify your Father in heaven*” – that others may witness the power of God to transform lives and produce a godly people. The word may be used as an equivalent to the word ‘*salt*’ as an influence (see Mk. 9:50), i.e., become a “salty” people. Not that non-believers would necessarily want to mimic what you **do**, but become what you **are**.

Good (Gk. *Agathos*, benevolent) Works

The believer, however, is also encouraged to do acts of kindness towards others as indicated by the other Greek word for “good,” *agathos*. This word primarily indicates benevolent, profitable, useful, benefiting others, well doing. Note the following sampling of scriptures:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good (*agathos*) works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” *Eph. 2:10*

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good (*agathos*) to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” *Gal. 6:10*

“... having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good (*agathos*) works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” *1 Pet. 2:12*

Examples when both words (*kalos* and *agathos*) are used.

In order to further clarify the distinction between these two words the following scriptures uses both words for goodness:

“But the ones *that* fell on the (*kalos*, inherently) good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and (*agathos*, benevolently) good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience.” *Luk. 8:15*

“Let them *do* (*agathos*, benevolently) *good*, that they be rich in (*kalos*, **inherently**) good works, ready to give, willing to share, [...].” 1 Tim. 6:18

In order for the ground to bring forth quality fruit (be useful, benevolent), its soil must first be inherently or constitutionally good. Similarly, one must **be** inherently, or inwardly good in order to **do** (true) benevolently good works.

“by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.” 2 Pet. 1:4

Believers can become *kalos* (inherently good) through faith in Christ as a partaker of God's nature, which was manifested in Christ. This may sound high and lofty, but note, the verse quoted above actually says, “**you may be partakers of the divine nature**”.

Christ is inherently righteous. Only He can reveal to man what His Father expects of him. Man is incapable of **doing** what God expects of him – even though he may be quite busy in many good deeds. Christ both justifies the believer and works His righteousness into the believing one. His works are then truly *kalos* (inherently good) and can become *agathos* (benevolently good) to others, and be acceptable to God – and bring glory to Him.

1. First Things First (*Kalos*) Inherently Good Works

That which is *within* should or must precede that which is *without*. In my little hometown of Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, there are several homes that are quite old and one passing by would never know are as much as 200 years old. Beneath an exterior *façade* of some kind of newer siding stands a log house. The house is only made to look newer. *Facades* are nice in a way, in that buildings may outwardly look more presentable, but inside they are quite antiquated. None of these homes have ever been restored to their original character of a log building. They have either been sided with a newer *façade* or torn down for commercial property.

Recently I was in conversation with someone steeped in Eastern philosophy. The subject focused on “goodness”, such as exhibited by the Dali Lama of India. This individual said that sometimes he tries to picture himself sitting next to this good man. “My behavior would be different,” he said. “I would control my anger or impatience more.” Many Christians have the same approach to goodness when they ask, “what would Jesus do?” (WWJD). They then try to alter their behavior around this *visionary model*. Is this not just erecting a personality *façade* - just fixing up the exterior to make them more presentable or more conformable and acceptable to some spiritual or social standard? Just as a *face-lift* (*façade* is Fr. for *face*) modifies ones external appearance, the inward man is left unchanged.

It is true that if one becomes focused on this *visionary model*, behavioral patterns eventually begin to change. However, to paraphrase Watchman Nee, the *suppression* of character flaws is far different from the *expression* of an inward transformation. *Suppression* creates a mental and physical appearance (*façade*) and may pacify the conscience. It may even give an individual a sense of ‘pride in his humility’ (an oxymoron). Also, since many of these character flaws like anger, pride, and hate are only suppressed, sometimes deeply, they remain in one as a dormant disease. This falls short of God’s provision for *kalos* (inherently) good works.

Shallowness of Outward Conformity

Many may find the shallowness and incompleteness of self-works conforming to some outward standard – whether this standard be a person or legal system. They identify with the apostle Paul, who when struggling with the outward law of God and the inward law of sin, cried out, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” *Rm. 7:24*. Then, coming into a new realization and understanding of the power of an indwelling Christ, they too break forth with the proclamation: “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” *Rm. 7:25*. And, upon seeing the effects of such inward transformation, they continue to stand in agreement with Paul once more when he writes: “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” *Phil. 3:7-8*. All those struggles to *tame* the old nature, to bring it under control through all kinds of mental and bodily discipline, and the results thereof, are declared “loss” and “rubbish” for the “excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus”.

If outward conformity is not of the Spirit, as described above as *suppression* of bad character flaws and *commitment* towards a better character, then it is of the works and efforts of the talents, disposition, and resolve of man. If this is so, then all manifestations are also *self-works*. Even though *self-works* are seemingly good, they fall short of God's intended purpose of (*kalos*), i.e., **inherently good works** that are manifested from a new heart and new spirit - the new birth in Christ.

Law of the Minimum

There is a principle in soil science called "the law of the minimum". It states that the ability of the soil to produce a crop or fruit is limited by its most limiting component. Its most limiting component might be lacking one or more of essential nutrients, acidity, organic matter, clay content, depth, internal structure, and so on. In short, a soil may seem fertile with the major nutrients, be a good seed-bed, have the right moisture and temperature, and still produce a "deformed" fruit because an essential "micro-nutrient", or trace element, is missing. However, good soil is good soil – for it has all the inherently good properties essential for producing quality fruit. The *only* outside requirements needed are rainfall and temperature in its season.

I live in a local section of the Appalachian Great Valley known as the Cumberland Valley. About twenty miles wide, two distinct soil types underlie the valley. On the eastern side is relatively deep, fertile limestone soil. On the western side is a more shallow, much less fertile shale soil. Corn is grown on both soils. However, the crop on the inherently rich limestone soil brings forth not only a greater yield of corn, but also is more nutritious and better tasting. Its fruit, the corn kernels, is good compared to that produced on the inherently poor shale soil, which may produce a corn that tastes ok, but lacks quality. Nutrient value is passed on to the one who eats it, whether man or animal. It all begins with inherent (*kalos*) "goodness".

We must agree also that "potential" for quality fruit bearing and "actual" fruit bearing can be miles apart. One summer I noticed a particularly poor corn crop on a farm noted for having the most productive soil in the area – the limestone soil. The rainfall that season had been good. I asked the farmer for the reason for such a poor crop and he replied, "we have had a particularly cool spring and summer thus far." Thus, unless or until warmer weather comes, the crop will be limited and fruit poor. Thus a need still exists for an external input.

The believer in Jesus may be an inheritor of a good soil ("as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust." 2Pet. 1:3-4) but unless continually given over to Christ, the required warmth and moisture brought by the Spirit will be missing and inwrought works will be severely inhibited. Belief (or faith), which includes *yielding*, in Christ for eternal life continues beyond the initial act of confession. This belief, and *yielding*, to the Christ within is in the Greek present tense, which means 'having begun it continues continuously'. Thus, One may help to cause the rain and warmth of the Spirit for the fruit of Christ-likeness.

Working the Works of God - A continuing discussion of (*kalos*) or “Inherently” good works.

Jesus Christ had just multiplied loaves and fishes to feed 5000 followers, and having departed them, His disciples beheld Him walking on the sea. After this, many of the multitude pursued after Christ and having found Him asked, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” *John 6:28*. Maybe their motives in asking such may be questioned. They seemed to be more caught up with the outward spectacular. However, it was a legitimate question. Rather than going on to a lengthy discourse (which I am about to do) Jesus simply said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” *Jn. 6:29*. This is the foundational truth – the true work of God can only begin in the inward man and that by Christ Himself.

God is still working

Everyone knows the creation account took six days, and on the seventh day God rested from His work. However, a distinction must be made here between two Hebrew words used in Genesis. *Basa* refers to God’s work of creating - “out of nothing”, whereas *asah* refers to God’s work of making or refinement of those things created. Although God rested from His (*basa*) work on the seventh day, the refining (*asah*) work continues ... to this day! Perhaps we should take a closer look at this *asah* “work” of God. One of the most profound scriptures describing the *asah* work of God is in Jeremiah:

“But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I *am* the LORD, **exercising** (*working*) **lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness** in the earth. For in these I **delight**,” says the LORD.” *Jer. 9:24*

The word translated **exercising** is actually *asah*. It means to work, labor, toil, create, to “do” or “make”; refining that which had been created (*basa*) out of nothing. Thus God is describing His continued work in the earth. What is it He is working in the earth? What is His priority? What does He emphasize? Is He looking to gather great numbers of followers or worshippers? Or perhaps He is looking to have built great edifices in His honor? The three words that follow are of utmost importance for they are all words that deal with **relationship** and **character**. They describe the nature of the relationship God our Father desires to have both with and from His children. The words *lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness* not only describes how God relates to man, but how man is to relate to God as well - that is why He is **working** them in the **earth**.

Describe God

When Keith asked some members of his fellowship how they perceive God, some said, ‘I see God as love,’ and others said, ‘I see God as judge.’ To which he asked, “which characteristic is more prominent?”

Brief Definitions

Lovingkindness – the basic idea is an act of kindness, love, or mercy (even grace) shown to someone. It is essential to God’s character. Our covenant with Him is the relationship from which *lovingkindness* flow.

Judgment – verdict, sentence, formal decree. Actually refers to all the functions of government – judicial, executive, and legislative. An attribute of God, it is in His character. All authority belongs to Him. Justice rewards the righteous, and punishes the wicked.

Righteousness – justice, faithfulness. The relationship between God and man (or man and man) may be described by this word if the parties are faithful to the expectations of one another.

This passage in Jeremiah goes on to say that God **delights** in such expressions. It is in His character to manifest these qualities and He finds great pleasure for their manifestation in His people.

Esther was an Old Testament type of the true church. Before being raised up as queen by King Ahasuerus, she underwent twelve months of beauty preparation with oil of myrrh and other spices and with other preparations. These were **worked into** her, making her skin soft, giving her a pleasant odor, and perhaps the other preparations included refinement of her dress and mannerisms. At the end of the time of preparation Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus and, "The king loved Esther more than all the *other* women, and she obtained grace and favor (same word translated **lovingkindness**) in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti." *Esther 2:17*.

Yes, today God still **works** in the earth. Now however, He works to prepare a people as a bride for His Son. His highest is a people beyond a *servant-master* relationship, a people in which His qualities of *lovingkindness*, *judgment*, and *righteousness* have been **worked into** their character, as a people prepared to be a bride to Christ, the bridegroom. I believe the passage cited above in Jeremiah finds its New Testament equivalent in the passage:

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out (i.e., to carry out a task until it is finished) your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who **works in** you both to will and to do for *His* good **pleasure** (i.e., delight). Phil. 2:12-13.

God's **work** in the earth, and the **work** into which He calls the believer to participate, results in His **delight**. Note that the passage clearly says, "*work out* your salvation", and not *work for* your salvation. The new life in Christ is a gift of grace, but the continued work of that grace is to bring out the qualities of that life in our person. **The manifestation of that life is the highest form of Biblical good works.**

Lovingkindness is an inward response of kindness, love, or mercy as a genuine concern for another's well being. This is not necessarily an expression of fond affinity towards another for the disposition of the other may be quite harsh and difficult to handle, even offensive. *Lovingkindness* does not require a response - as found in Paul's love to the Corinthian church: "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved." 2Cor. 12:15. Perhaps the most difficult concept to grasp here is that *lovingkindness* does not find its origin in one's self-effort to mimic or pattern oneself after Christ. Rather it is a gradual but continual growing expression of a new inward nature born of God. The problem being, that it is often easier to occasionally copy the behavior of Christ than it is by faith to persistently believe that a divine power abides within, a power possessing the nature of Christ:

Gem

Regarding the expression of the inward life of Christ, Erika replied, "it is something non-believers cannot imitate and believers cannot hide."

"as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust." 2 Peter 1:3-4.

And that by faith, a continuing daily belief, this Christ-like nature may find its holy expression:

“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*.

Lovingkindness Manifested

John Willis Zumwait, Frontline newsletter magazine, writes of a missionary sent to the mountains of China where he encountered many “mean, monstrous, and insensitive people – those under the Kingdom of Darkness for perhaps thousands of years.” Where does the true *good work* of compassion and love come from when faced with people so difficult to love?

He writes, “Our love for the “heathen” is about an inch deep, and they will quickly bleed us dry of all human compassion. But that is where the love of Jesus is so far beyond imitation. As His love flows through us, we are made capable of laying down our lives for cruel and hateful ...lost people.” He goes on to write, “Without being intimately connected to Jesus, we will not care for their souls. True passion for and connection to Jesus enable us to keep caring out of the bottomless depths of His heart, not the shallow pool of human concern.” (Winter 2005 issue)

Judgment perhaps more than any other word relates the believer to God and His Kingdom. Children of God? Yes. Family of God? Yes. Citizens? Yes. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” *Phil. 3:20*. The apostle Paul was born a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, of the family of Abraham. He was also born a citizen of Rome (*Acts 22.28*). As such he was subject to authority of that government with all its ordinances, requirements, penalties, rights and privileges – executive, legislative, and judicial.

A believer is born into the family of God (one who was not a child but is now a born-child of God) and is also born as a citizen into the Kingdom of God. As such, the believer not only comes into obedient authority of the government of God, but also becomes a participant in both manifesting the absoluteness of its sovereignty and the spread of its jurisdiction. Thus *judgment* directly relates to God’s government, or the government of the Kingdom. It also relates to authority, obedience, statutes, ordinances, deeds, and recompenses. To this the prophet Jeremiah writes,

“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” *Jer.17:9-10*.

And the prophet Ezekiel, looking to the promise to come, writes,

“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. But *as for those* whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord GOD.” *Eze. 11:19-21*.

Jesus, the born Son of God, lived in absolute obedience to His Father as the One who sits in absolute authority on the throne. He proclaimed the message of the Kingdom, and its *judgments*, to those who would hear. Jesus clearly expressed the need for obedience to the

higher ordinances and commandments of God, **not** of the Law, but of the Spirit and the inward man, as spoken by the prophet Ezekiel. For example, Jesus speaks, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Jn. 15:10. This verse begins with that little but mighty word, "if". The work of *judgment* in a believer brings the believer to obedience and submission to the theocracy of a loving and merciful God. He is a King that rewards obedience and brings discipline and penalty to the disobedient.

"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

*'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.'*" Heb. 12:5-8.

If you endure chastening, God deals with you, as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons... of God.

Judgment and Governmental Forgiveness

Watchman Nee writes about a specific aspect of *judgment*: God's governmental forgiveness. As in the natural, a parent may forgive their child of disobedience and restore their fellowship but the parent cannot give the child full liberty, but put on some restraints. The parent's way (of relating) has changed.

God's government is a way, God's administration. Forgiveness is rather easy to obtain. He who sincerely confesses his sin will have his fellowship with God restored. Never the less, God may change His way towards him. It may be God's discipline will immediately come upon him; God may not give him as much liberty as he enjoyed before. Another day may come when God removes His disciplinary hand – and this is called **governmental forgiveness**. The only thing one can do is subject himself to the mighty hand of God. The humbler one is under His mighty hand and the less we resist, the easier it will be to have the governmental hand of God removed from us. If we are not submissive and patient, but murmur from within, it will be harder for the governmental hand of God to be removed.

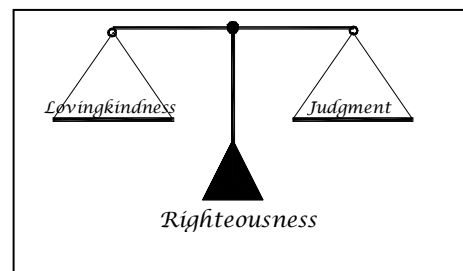
"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Gal. 6:7

Watchman Nee, Love One Another. Christ. Fellowship Pub., 1975

Righteousness is not necessarily "goodness" as man thinks of goodness or good behavior. Many of the acts of Jesus were deemed unrighteous by those who observed Him and listened to His teachings – even though He only did what the Father told Him to do, and said what the Father told Him to say (see Jn. 5:19; 12:49). The Pharisees and priest were among the most vocal of the critics. But all of Jesus' acts were righteous to the Father. All *righteous* acts or deeds will not necessarily be considered 'right' in the eyes of the existing government, society, or religious system(s). It is written that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for *righteousness*. (Gn.15:6; Rm. 4:22). It was as though when Abraham responded *rightly* to God, that God recorded (accounted) his deed in His Divine ledger and moved the record from the left (good/bad) side of the ledger to the *right* side – the side of *righteous* deeds.

Righteousness and Conduct. Our righteousness and our conduct before God are not the same. Our conduct is subject to change, and its behavior is sometimes acceptable and sometimes unacceptable – sometimes righteous, sometimes unrighteous. However, because of the absolute righteousness of God our righteousness before Him is not our conduct, but Christ. It is forever stable. This gives us release to pray and to commune with God with boldness. Thank God for His grace by which we have been clothed with the *robe of righteousness*, His Son, our Savior. Our unacceptable behavior may be dealt with discipline (as described previously under *Judgment*) but God remains approachable.

Righteousness as 'Lovingkindness + Judgment'. As God chooses to act, His *lovingkindness* and His *judgment* balance one another and the act manifested is *righteousness*. For example, God's love for man did not violate His condemnation for sin, or vice versa. He could not just lovingly forgive the sin because it would violate His *judgment*. Nor could He just condemn the sinner to eternal punishment because it would violate His *lovingkindness*. This would be a dilemma for man but not for God. He righteously sent His Son as a sacrifice, the righteous for the unrighteous. And, the will of man was not violated. He has the right to choose or reject this salvation.



In like manner Jesus exercised righteousness in the instance of the woman caught in the act of adultery (Jn. 8:1-11). The *judgment* of the Law required the woman to be stoned and Jesus' *love* for this woman could not violate the Law by just calling for forgiveness. Instead *righteousness* was expressed as His *love* and *judgment* were balanced with the command, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." Jn. 8:7b. This simple one line statement was so profound that it turned the heart of a good friend mine to Christ. This man was a Jew who happened to read this passage but stopped short of Jesus' reply in verse 7. He contemplated all possible things Jesus may have said. When he returned to read verse 7 this friend said, "Only the Messiah could have come up with this reply." *Righteousness* is Godly, and the Son of God is *righteous*.

Righteousness as a good work in believers. Does it not follow that God delights when His work of *lovingkindness* and *judgment* in His children manifests as *righteousness* as well? We must learn this principle of *righteousness* and not be loose in our daily walk. Our conduct must progressively become righteous. Our sense of *lovingkindness* cannot violate our sense of Godly *judgment*, nor should our sense of Godly *judgment* come forth without *lovingkindness*.

Many of today's churches are filled with believers whose focus is on *judgment* or on *lovingkindness* – but not on *righteousness*. They confuse righteousness with one or the other. Let me explain. Have you ever heard of "legalism"? This stand brings rapid condemnation to sin (and the sinner), mannerisms of a lifestyle, or any non-conformity to a set behavior pattern. On the other extreme many are those who hold the "gospel of love." This position holds for tolerance, acceptability, and forgiveness. It often overlooks sin, improper conduct and worldly indulgences for the sake of unity. "Legalistic" churches will quickly condemn, even excommunicate, the offender while the "gospel of love" churches, being tolerant and forgiving, may receive the offender into its

It has been said,
"judgment without
love is *hard-hearted*,
but love without
judgment is *soft-headed*."

congregation. The result is “legalism” violating *lovingkindness* and the “gospel of love” violating *judgment*. Righteousness is not being served.

Unrighteous works are expressions of one’s heart originating from selfish motivations, fear, pride, legalistic disposition, or even a loving disposition. *Judgment* and *lovingkindness* must work in tandem with one another. And this can only originate from a regenerated heart through an intimate relationship with Christ. When Jesus said, “I am **the** way, **the** truth, and **the** life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” *Jn. 14:6*, He used the definite article ‘**the**’ three times to emphasize He is the only path to the Father. He did not say that He was ‘**a**’ way, or even ‘**a better**’ way. Jesus further emphasizes the path of *righteousness* - balancing *judgment* and *lovingkindness*:

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” *Jn. 14:21*

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’” *Jn. 14:23*.

Can one truly love God of himself? I think not. True love (*agape*) is born in the heart. It cannot be mimicked. One can try to please God by trying to become obedient to His *Judgments*. O we must realize God is a person! He is not a power, a universal force, a principle, or any such impersonal expressions. As a person He too loves and expresses a personal nature – as He reveals to Moses, “And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, [...]’” *Ex. 34:6*. *Lovingkindness* is the motivating factor initiating movement. *Judgment* is the road traveled.

When Conduct Becomes Righteousness

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” *1 Jn. 1:9*

In terms of our righteous relationship with others, Watchman Nee defines a guiding principle of righteousness as: *owing nothing to anybody: take not what is undeserved, give not what is improper*. God saves us according to (Christ’s) righteousness. This is the way we enter in. This being true we cannot afford to be careless in anything in our lives. Many so-called Christians cause plenty of heartache to others because they never seem to have any sense of righteousness, and are not even aware of what unrighteousness is. Hence we must learn this principle of righteousness.

We should not owe any man anything. Some, having become Christians, have never apologized or made any restitution. Nee describes unrighteousness as acts of defrauding, taking possessions of others, as well as infringing upon the rights of others. For example, a child has a right to peace, therefore quarreling parents infringe upon that right.

Nee further explains more concrete examples of righteous conduct under the headings of:

- Dealing with Unrighteous Money – Any improper means to make others’ money ours. This includes the government and taxes. We ought to make reparation.
- Dealing with All Material Indebtedness – Borrowing things and not returning them. Being careless with others’ property.
- Dealing with Greedy Habits – We must learn to seek the welfare of others, never taking advantage of them – even legally. Treating others with respect.
- Deal with Any Encroachment on Others’ Rights – Disturbing others with avoidable noise, reading others’ personal documents, courtesy in waiting lines, etc.
- Confess Our Faults – It is not knowing our faults, but knowing them without confessing them. This includes asking forgiveness from those offended.
- Pray and Encourage One Another – If we notice unrighteousness in others, we should pray for them. We must learn to speak the truth in love.

Thus, may we summarize this part of the study of *good works* by saying that **inherently** (Gk. *Kalos*) *good works* are a manifestation of a new heart. When we receive the life of Christ through the Holy Spirit we are united with God, to be one with Him, and to share in His nature. The qualities of this nature, as *lovingkindness*, *judgment*, and *righteousness* are to be demonstrated or manifested in us. These are not created attributes; they are of His eternal Godly nature.

Note From A Friend

Koser writes, "I feel that one of the fundamental flaws within the church today is that the people do not realize that the life of Christ is resident within them through the new birth. This is a highly neglected area and since it is so foundational, it leads to misunderstandings of the life we have in Christ. If people understood that this life is resident in them, they would understand that imitated goodness is not enough. Our *agathos* (benevolent good) must result from our *kalos* (inherent good), and we receive our *kalos* nature when we are born again. Goodness is too often trying to be produced from the flesh nature, rather than doing good lead of the spirit. Paul writes,

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good (*agathos*, benevolently good) dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good (*kalos*, inherently good) I do not find." *Rm.7:18*.

Much of the humanistic view has pervaded the gospel in this day. People would say that they are inherently good. Paul's passage disagrees. Even though he wishes to do good, beneficial deeds, he realizes he cannot (even though he could probably mimic them) because his flesh is not inherently good. It is sinful!! We must see our wretched nature. We must understand that good does not indwell us until we have been born again and have the Spirit of God dwelling in us. And when this happens, we must submit our entire lives to the leading of the Spirit so that we do not continue in the flesh and make the costly error of dead works.

2. (Agathos) Benevolently Good Works.

The original intent of this study was to focus on what may be termed **benevolent good works** and to challenge a traditional concept of Christian *good works*. However, it seems the Spirit desired a fuller understanding of Christian *good works* by the fore-mentioned study on **inherent** (*kalos*) *good works*. And rightfully so - the inward working of God in our lives to create **constitutionally** good character **must precede any and all outward acts of benevolent goodness**.

Thus, questions remain regarding (*agathos*) **benevolent good works**: 1) to whom should the deeds be primarily directed, i.e., to God, to believers, to non-believers – or perhaps to all equally, or is there a priority, and 2) what is the nature of these (*agathos*) *good works*, these outwardly useful and beneficial deeds to others? Setting aside our previously developed feelings and attitudes regarding the nature of good works, let us simply look to the Scriptures for understanding.

The remainder of this text will attempt to answer these questions. It will focus on (*agathos*) beneficial to other *good works* and synonymous words meaning benevolent good, and not on (*kalos*) being constitutionally or inherently good.

Focus – The Driving Force of Good Works

Some questions: Is there not a distinction between volunteering or committing one's time and resources 'here and there' just wanting to do something good for others and specific works born from an inward drive to fulfill one's 'calling'? Should not a distinction be made between **indiscriminate** and **focused** good works? Is it not safe to say that the more absorbed or focused one is with his or her calling and destiny the more the works associated with their life become spontaneous, symptomatic, and true to that calling? Would not these works be as a natural spring of water issuing forth from an inward pool? Following are some examples of good works by those so focused.

Focus in the life of Christ. Scriptures testify well of Jesus' benevolent ministry:

“...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” *Acts 10:38*

“*Who went about*”, but to where, and to whom and doing what? The inwrought benevolent nature of God was undoubtedly expressed in His Son, Jesus Christ. But upon looking more closely we see that His ministry was highly focused. First, He was one **sent** (by the Father). Secondly, He was sent to a **particular people** (the lost House of Israel). Thirdly, He was sent to fulfill His **mission** to establish or plant the Kingdom of God within this people. Consider the following passages regarding Jesus' discussion with a Canaanite woman:

“And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.’ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she cries out after us.’”

But He answered and said, 'I was not **sent** except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'

Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!'

But He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs (puppies).'

And she said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.'

Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour." *Mat. 15:22-28*

Do you ever hear of the disciples, or even the Lord Himself, being criticized for their seemingly callousness to this poor (heathen) woman. Great was her distress, and the Lord and the disciples attempted to shun her and called her a puppy. Only after her persistence and faith in the Lord was her petition granted, for it was then demonstrated and documented for all time, to the entire world, that persistence and faith in the gracious nature of God in Christ reaps a reward. (Even Peter, after Jesus' resurrection, was focused on saving Israel but the over-riding faith of the Roman Centurion drew Peter to him. *Acts 10:23ff.*) But Jesus Christ was focused and would not be sidetracked unless granted by His Father in Heaven.

Consider further:

"These twelve Jesus **sent** out and commanded them, saying: 'Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the **house of Israel**. And as you go, preach, saying, "The **kingdom of heaven** is at hand.'" *Mat. 10:5-7*

Yes, the Lord was very focused. As He was one **sent** to the lost sheep of **the house of Israel** to bring forth the **Kingdom of God**, so too did He direct His disciples to do the same. His mission never changed. He was kind to all, even the Samaritan woman at the well (see John 4) for that was His nature (remember *kalos*, 'inherently good'?). However, He was intensely focused on His Father's will - "*Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.'*" *Heb. 10:7* Note the progression:

From: "But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me." *Jn. 5:36*

To: "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them." *Jn. 17:9-10*

To: "Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." *Lk. 9:51*

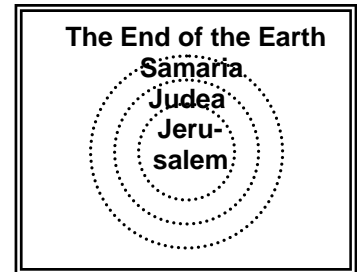
Then: "So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." *Jn. 19:30*

Jesus never deviated from His calling. His focus was to do the Father's will and to fulfill the purpose for which He had been sent. He studied and knew the Scriptures in which He found the Word regarding Himself and His destiny. He fasted, prayed, fellowshiped with and worshipped the Father from which He received both strength and revelation. He taught and preached to the lost House of Israel. He exhorted, rebuked, and disciplined those closest to Him. His ministry exemplified miraculous works that testified that the Father was with Him. Love for the Father and His brethren were the essence of His nature. He never involved Himself with politics or political demonstrations. He never started benevolent programs for the needy or volunteered for social services or civic duties. 'All' He did was to obey the

Father's will and thereby provide a way for all mankind to enter the Kingdom of God, to be cleansed of their sins, and be born anew of His spirit. "It is finished!"

Jesus' focus never wavered – even after His resurrection from the dead. Just before His ascension to heaven He instructed His disciples, "... and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

As a pebble cast into a pool of water generates waves outward from the point of impact, the wave of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ has spread from that humble beginning in Jerusalem and is continuing to the end of the earth.



Focus in the Life of Paul. In many ways Paul's walk and works were patterned after Christ's. He was one sent, to a particular people, and with a specific mission. And, like Jesus Christ, he was very focused on his calling. Consider the progression in the following scriptures, as Paul "presses towards the mark". Phil. 3:14

From: "So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are **appointed** for you to do.' Acts 22:10

Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will **send** you far from here to the Gentiles.'" Acts 22:21

To: "...that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same **body**, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the **gospel**, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power." Eph. 3:6-7

To: "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." Col. 1:27-29

Then: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." 2 Tim. 4:6-7

This is but a brief but poignant synopsis of Paul's life and ministry. Although **called** of the Lord and **sent** to the **Gentiles**, in every city he too went to the **lost house of Israel** first. Then, following rejection by them, he turned to the Gentiles. Consider the following:

"So when the Jews went out of the **synagogue**, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the **Jews** and devout **proselytes** followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, '**It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.**' For so the Lord has commanded us:

*'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'*

Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." Acts 13:42-48.

And,

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a **synagogue of the Jews**. Then **Paul, as his custom was, went in to them**, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with

them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. But the **Jews who were not persuaded**, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.” *Acts 17:1-5*

Throughout Paul’s life and ministry his works focused on:

1) A single message of entering the Kingdom of God through the Gospel of the cross of Christ,

“... strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” *Acts 14:22*

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” *1 Cor. 1:18*

“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” 1
Cor. 2:2

2) Forming in all the earth a single body of believers, the Body of Christ of both Jew and Gentile,

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” *1 Cor. 12:12-13*

3) To bring this Body of believers unto a place of maturity (often translated *perfection*) in which they are prepared as the bride awaiting the return of Christ,

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to **His working** which **works in me** mightily.” *Col. 1:24-29*

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” *2 Cor. 11:2*

Was the apostle Paul surrounded by the poor, the destitute, the sick, orphans, social and governmental abuses and atrocities, and other such needs of the day? Of course he was. But Paul was a man driven not by a social gospel, but the Gospel of a crucified Christ, of repentance, of the promise of the indwelling Spirit, of entrance (present and future) into the Kingdom of God. His message and ministry dealt with the eternal of God. His love of Christ compelled him to reach every soul: Jew, Gentile, slave, free, male, and female with the Gospel of Christ, to bring entrance into the Kingdom. But entrance was not enough. His revelation of the *mystery of the church* drove him to bring the new believers to a place of maturity, as a functioning member of the Body of Christ, and unto holiness in their walk. Paul

would not be sidetracked. His concern and care was for the building up, strengthening, and welfare of the Church – for it was “in him” to do so. This welfare included both spiritual and physical needs.

Focus in the life of Believers. That which was true in the life and calling of Christ Jesus and of Paul was equally true of the focus in the lives of the other disciples as evidenced in the writings of Peter, James, and John. Were all of these concerned about the well being of others? Certainly they were. But above all their focus forced them to place constraints on their efforts. Each had a given amount of time on this earth and a given amount of resources. Their priority was **first** spiritual works, to fulfill that to which they had been called, and **secondly** natural or physical works towards the needs of the Church, the Body of Christ. All else came in a far, far distant **third**. This is the pattern established for every believer.

Spiritual Work

In the following commentary, Oswald Chambers stresses the great need for true *spiritual work* by the believer.

The Right Lines of Work

Very few of us have any understanding of the reason why Jesus Christ died. If sympathy is all that human beings need, then the Cross of Christ is a farce, there was no need for it. What the world needs is not “a little bit of love,” but a surgical operation.

When you find yourself face to face with a person who is spiritually lost, remind yourself of Jesus Christ on the cross. If that person can get to God in any other way, then the Cross of Christ is unnecessary. If you think you are helping lost people with your sympathy and understanding, you are a traitor to Jesus Christ. You have to keep your soul rightly related to God and pour out for others on His line, not pour out on the human line and ignore God. The great note today is **amiable religiosity**.

The one thing we have to do is to exhibit Jesus Christ crucified, to lift Him up all the time. Every doctrine that is not imbedded in the cross of Jesus will lead astray. If the worker himself believes in Jesus Christ and is banking on the Reality of Redemption, the people he talks to *must* be concerned. The thing that remains and deepens is the worker’s simple relationship to Jesus Christ; his usefulness to God depends on that alone.

The calling of a New Testament worker is to expose sin and to reveal Jesus Christ as Savior. Consequently, he cannot be poetical, he must be sternly surgical. We are sent by God to lift up Jesus Christ, not to give wonderfully beautiful discourses. We have to probe straight down as deeply as God has probed us, to be keen in sensing the Scriptures which brings the truth straight home and to apply them fearlessly.

Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His highest, p.355.

If one has an hour to spare, a day or week to give, should not the primary focus be on our high priestly calling? “But you *are* a chosen generation, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” *1 Peter 2:9*. **Are there any works greater? Can any benevolently good work exceed the impartation, or substantiation of the Spirit of the living Christ into the hearts and minds of others? Paul wrote about such men:**

“Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.” *Col. 4:7.*

“...and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” *Col. 4:11-12.*

Although Tychicus was known to travel, do you think the ‘Church’ supported these men while they focused on full time ministry, this priestly calling? I don’t think so. I believe they were men like, “Luke the beloved physician [...]” *Col. 4:14*, men who supported themselves for a living, most likely having wives and families as well. These were men who sensed being apprehended by Christ towards a purpose, a goal. These were men of **focus**.

Paul also wrote about women walking in their priestly calling, devoted to the Gospel of Christ:

“I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, [...].” *Phil. 4:2-3.*

Were these women given to “full time” ministry? Again, I think not. Quite conceivably they had family and household responsibilities as well. These were women quite like the women in your church/fellowship. Like the men, these were women of **focus**.

I doubt very much if these men and women were volunteering for all sorts of civic or community services – even seemingly good causes. If their work did not directly contribute to the advancement of the Kingdom of God, and to the pulling down of the Kingdom of Darkness, they were not interested. The Gospel of the Kingdom had to be spread **to** the lives of unbelievers and had to be implemented **in** the lives of believers. Priority one! “...redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” *Eph. 5:16*. When not in direct spiritual fellowship of worship and communion, they focused their *spiritual* (benevolent) *work* on matters like prayer, sharing the Gospel, counseling, the study of Scriptures, witnessing, mentoring, encouraging, growing in faith and in character.

Good natural or physical works

This entire study on *good works* was actually initiated in response to this particular issue. Gwen was one of the leaders in a college Christian fellowship. The group would often undertake projects of *good works* – especially during open times like Spring Break. She kept challenging my thoughts on the matter. She too was schooled on the concept that *good works* consisted of indiscriminate benevolent acts of kindness towards society and mankind, the Church included. At first it was very difficult for her to accept the Scriptural concept of *good works* not as **indiscriminate** benevolent deeds, but **works focused**, or principally directed, on the physical well being of the Church, the Body of Christ.

The world has its government programs, civic organizations, and community services. A few examples are The Red Cross, UNICEF, World Health Organization, Habitat for Humanity, The United Way, Save the Children, The American Heart Association, and The March of Dimes. Perhaps even the World Council of Churches, due to its nature and goals, can be added to this list. Included also in the list are the many local volunteer groups: firemen, hospital helpers, hospice workers, meals on wheels, food banks, and many other caring

organizations. All these groups and organization are there because people care and want to help others. This is good and the world is better off for them.

As a citizens and residents of local communities there is a need, and perhaps a duty, to support *some* of these charities. However, the *primary* focus to which the greatest amount of time, effort, and money is directed to needs of the Church. Following is a sampling of scriptures that highlight the concept of *Biblical* (benevolent) *good works*. These works are intended to all mankind in general, but is first and foremost directed towards the well-being and care of the Church, the Body of Christ and its members, in particular.

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, **especially** to those who are of the household of faith.”
Gal. 6:10

This concept is founded upon the understanding that the Christian community consists of “called-out” ones, those in the world but not of the world; those whose new citizenship is heavenly and who are called saints (“separated” ones). The Body of Christ, the family of God, is a community of believers whose well being, spiritually as well as physically, is first and foremost.

The Church is the focus.

Jesus. In Mathew 25:31-46 Jesus uses a parable to describe the future judgment and how a king (Himself) will set those on His right who gave Him food and drink when He was hungry and thirsty, clothed Him, and visited Him when He was sick and in prison. These righteous ones will then ask Him when they did these things to Him. Jesus answered,

“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My **brethren**, you did *it* to Me.’” *Mat. 25:40.*

Here, Jesus uses the word **brethren**. This word in the Greek is *adelphos*, which is derived from the word ‘*womb*’ – thus meaning a brother. (The NIV and NASB both translate this portion of verse, “these brothers of mine.”) Jesus refers to brother and sisters in Christ with this name elsewhere in Scriptures. John, Luke (Acts) and Paul also use the word **brethren** to describe those of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Paul. Paul wrote of many deep things of God. He brought light to many mysteries, and expounded wisdom, “... in which are some things hard to understand, [...]” *2 Pet. 3:16.* But Paul was also very practical and very clear on matters concerning the needs of the Church:

“...distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.” *Rom. 12:13*

“Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, ...; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. ... I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which *you had* previously promised, that it may be ready as *a matter of* generosity and not as a grudging obligation. But this *I say*: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. *So let* each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” *2 Cor. 9:1-7*

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also.” *1 Cor. 16:1.*

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” *Gal. 5:13*

“...well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers (traveling ministries), if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.” *1 Tim. 5:10*

“If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve (aid) them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.” *1 Tim. 5:16*

And, in Hebrews:

“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.” *Heb. 13:3*

Personally, I believe the writer of Hebrews is speaking here of brethren being held captive, and/or persecuted for the sake of Christ.

James. When it comes to *good works*, many Christians cite the following Scripture as an encouragement for the necessity of doing good deeds.

“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, *Jam. 2:14-15*.

But many fail to notice the emphasis of the focus of the *good works*, i.e., a brother or sister. And, I don’t think James equates everyone in the world as brothers and sisters, rather, specifically those who are “in Christ.” Furthermore, James stresses the fact there is to be shown no partiality among the brethren.

“... and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” *James 2:3*

Luke. Perhaps the greatest degree to which the Church is described as taking care of itself is in the Book of Acts. Maybe it was because of necessity or some other reason. But the Church was certainly the focus of all benevolent works.

“Now the multitude of those **who believed** were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ... Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. *Acts 4:32-35*.

“Now all **who believed** were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” *Acts 2:44-45*.

There are many in society who cannot adequately care for themselves, such as some widows. However, the Church did not pass the responsibility on to society to care for the problem, nor did they seek to undertake society’s problem. They simply cared for their own.

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” *Acts 6:1-3*

Peter and John. This study is not a treatise on *love*, but on an aspect of the expression of that love with benevolent acts of kindness. However, if this study were to be on *love*, it would

also conclude that the principle object of that love, as well as benevolent works, is the **brethren**. This notion can be amply documented in the words of Christ as well as the apostles. Only a few references will be made here from Peter and John.

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” 1 Pet. 4:8-10

“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers (traveling ministries), who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If* you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.” 3 Jn. 5-8

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” 1 Jn. 3:16

Should we not be wise stewards of the resources with which God has so blessed our lives – whether it is financial, material, or spiritual; or of our talents or of our time?

The following insert is a response from Melchizedek, a Christian Minister, concerning the need in eastern India caused by the devastating tsunami wave of December 26, 2004. I believe it represents an example comparing social services and the call to benevolence focused on the Church. The email was dated December 30, 2004. (Underline mine.)

Tsunami Relief

Dear Brethren,

The Lord’s mercy spared Visakhapatnam. However, other coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh have been severely affected. Right now, the local governments are pressed to action for relief and food, clothing and temporary shelters are being provided. But the biggest challenge ahead is reconstruction and rehabilitation. This, government authorities tend to get slack on since it will no longer be an emergency after 3 or 4 weeks. This is when I believe we could help. I am attempting to raise resources to help reconstruct some church structures in affected villages. This will not only help local Christians find shelter but will bring them together. We expect to encounter large number of orphans and widows. I am glad we are involved in this kind of ministry and it will not be too difficult to take on the challenge of adopting some real needy ones.

Nevertheless, this project will not be set into motion until the end of January. Fortunately, this will give us time to pool all of our resources together. If you or friends in your area would like to help please write to me and I will send you more detailed information about our strategy to help those of the ‘household of faith’.

Sincerely,
MELCHIZEDEK

It is apparent from Scriptures that the focus of benevolent works is the Church, the Body of Christ. It is an entity in the world but separate from the world. Its members must devoutly and faithfully care it for in all ways. Examine the Scriptures again. To what did the apostles and disciples labor – even to the point of death? What is the product sought? Is it not to establish a people in the earth, as Israel of old, in which the only true God will be glorified, honored, and worshiped? “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” Mat. 5:14.

Summary and Conclusion

Often the Gospel of Christ is presented in such a way that any reality of it lies either in the past or in the future. We are to believe in Christ and be regenerated. Then, as Christians, look forward to the coming Kingdom and eternal life. The current *work* of the Church, and its members in particular, is to be a member of a local church, live respectable lives, and encourage evangelism/missionary work. *Good works* therefore falls into the category of *indiscriminate benevolent acts* to any in need or found lacking. However, an important and often neglected aspect of the Gospel is the call to spiritual maturity – and the theme of *good works* is central to the teaching of spiritual maturity; “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to **perfection** (maturity), [...]” Heb. 6:1. Christian *good works*, as described in this study, directs all efforts to the *good* (Gk. *Kalos*, inherent, inward) *works* to the believer’s character, and to the *good* (Gk. *Agathos*, benevolent, well doing) *works* towards all, but first and foremost to building up the Body of Christ, the Church.

The phrase, “*the Church is an organism not an organization,*” has been around for as long as I can remember, and undoubtedly long before that. Yet, when the Church is viewed either as a whole, or as a composite of many denominations, it more closely resembles an *organization* than a living *organism*. Instead of being a vital organism, a living entity with Christ as its head, today’s Church is highly structured and managed to more closely resemble a corporation, military institute, or bureau of the government. It has a hierarchy of authority, a set bylaws or governing principles, boards, office holders, designed programs and activities, teaching curriculum, and structured meetings. Its members, good people, devoutly support the Church, faithfully attend its programs and meetings, and attempt to lead good lives. It must be remembered that even corporations have codes of conduct its members must adhere to. Recently a high-ranking corporate officer in Boeing Aircraft was fired because of an adulterous relationship with another employee – a moral issue forbidden by the company. Growth is seen in the acquisition of new members, bigger and better facilities, many diverse programs and activities addressing most every interest of its members and community outreach.

Elements of the world have so infiltrated the Church that it has adopted many of the world’s methodologies, techniques, and policies. In many places Christ is being marketed and promoted, as one would market a bottle of Pepsi-Cola or a new car. Even the value system of the world has begun to creep into the Church with adultery and divorce rates in the Church equal to that of the world, and abortion, promiscuity, homosexuality, loose living, and so on found among its members. Do you not have your fill of seeing in the news media Church members, and frequently its leaders, indicted for fraud, or as pedophiles, embezzlers, even murderers?

Through the years there has been a slow, imperceptible, blending of the world’s views, practices, and value systems into the Church. Prominent figures as politicians, sport stars, and entertainers are supported because church members like what they **do**, but do not care what they **are** in character or moral values. The phrase, “Is it Christian to do this, or that,” is driven from a world’s view, and certainly not from a Biblical perspective. Many Christians participate in social or civic programs and activities deemed “good” by society because it seems the right thing to do. *Good works?* - From whose or what perspective?

Our youth have been indoctrinated from childhood to reflect more of a New Age philosophy by social engineering – in the educational system, television programs, cartoons, comic books, magazines, advertisements and commercials. Themes like tolerance and diversity suggest acceptance regardless of morality, character, godlessness, or idolatrous god. This attitude has been so engrained into our youth that I have seen occasions where young Christians have labored cleaning the bathrooms of a boozed-up fraternity house just to “show forth their good works.” I do not question their sincerity to Christ, but their efforts I find misguided.

Christ has not so called the Church. His calling to the Church is a high calling, as one set apart from the world but sent into the world for the fulfillment of His purposes – the establishment and enlargement of the Kingdom of God. The first petition in the Lord’s prayer is, “Thy Kingdom come.” Today, the greatest “work” in all the earth is to bring the Church, the Body of Christ into its *maturity*. This requires focus, intense living for the furtherance of the Kingdom.

The Message of the Kingdom

Education, medication, sanitation, and general sweetness – what does Satan care for that? *The word of the cross* is the great wire along which runs the dynamic of God – and it runs along no other wire. If God is permitting great investments of money, men, and time along other lines to be swept away, let us remember that the real Church of God, having the Holy Ghost, does not need great outward things. Paul built no colleges, schools, or institutions – which may be useful, never essential. But Paul’s last epistle, just before his martyrdom, says, “*The Lord stood by me and strengthened me; that through me THE MESSAGE might be fully proclaimed, and that all the gentiles might hear.*”

William R. Newell, Romans:Verse By Verse, footnote, p. 275.

Spiritual maturity is a state of **being** and not a state of **activity**. As such, things like Church attendance, involvement in religious programs and activities, and a life of good, benevolent works can only partially define it. Spiritual maturity may best be defined as:

Individual members of the Body of Christ becoming progressively Christ-like in character. Godly qualities of lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness should manifests relationships with God and with others. The believer must first come into ‘inherently’ good works through a progressive, intimate walk with Christ. This has been defined in this study as *good* (Gk. *Kalos*, inherent) *works*.

The Church, the Body of Christ becoming a living entity in the earth. Each living cell (member) intimately connected with other cells and to the head, which is Christ. The cells cluster to form organs of function, but no organ stands independent of another. No division, no independence, no anarchy may be found in this Body. The Body grows through addition to its substance, and by caring, nurturing, and protecting itself. This has been defined in this study by the second Greek word meaning ‘benevolently’ *good* (Gk. *agathos*, benevolent) *works*.

The following prophesy by Isaiah speaks of Christ, to be that which the Father sends to restore Israel and bring salvation to all mankind:

“Indeed He says,
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” *Is. 49:6*

This prophecy was fulfilled when Christ died on the cross, resurrected from the dead, ascended into Heaven, and the Holy Spirit sent to indwell that handful of Israel, those disciples at Jerusalem. From this came the birth of the Church, the Body of Christ. Is not Christ, as Head of this Body, now manifested in and through this Body?

“And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” *Eph. 1:22-23*

Christ is in the earth today, in His Church, bringing fulfillment to the prophecy, “I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” *Is. 49:6*. O what a *work*, a very *good work*, which must be done **in, by, and through** the Church, the Body of Christ. God in Christ invested His all into the Church – to raise up a people, a special people, out of the ashes of a cursed earth lying in darkness and despair, and set them as a shining city of light high upon a hill, to **be** His witness **for** His testimony in all the earth. “... just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her ..., that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. *Eph. 5:25-27*. The totality of the *works* of this many membered Body, this City set upon a hill, this Bride to be, must be totally focused toward this end.

“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” *Col. 1:28-29*.

May we finally conclude with a short quote from *In Christ*, by T. Austin-Sparks, pp.17-18.

“Perhaps there has never been a time when there was more of what is called “Christian service,” when there was as much organization, machinery, advertisement, expenditure of time, energy, and means in “Christian” enterprise, or when there were more people interested; but it is doubtful whether – speaking comparatively – there ever was as little real spiritual effectiveness. The root question is, how much of all this proceeds directly from revelation and initiation from God by the Eternal Spirit? Of how much may it be truly said that it came by revelation of the Holy Spirit, or the “the Holy Ghost said,” or that “it seemed good unto the Holy Ghost”? On the other hand, how much of it is the product of discussion, devising, impulse, enthusiasm, imaginativeness, philanthropy, interest in a good cause, etc.? The measure of the identification of the instrument with Christ in corporate union is the measure of the real work of God accomplished through it. There may be much that looks like success and impresses with a sense of real accomplishment, but when “the fire” has done its work it may be found that the real as against the apparent is very small. In the long run “the flesh profiteth *nothing*,” though it may seem to get results. It is not what is done *for* God, but what is done *by* God that will last. Ours it is to see that we are utterly in Christ, and living by the Spirit. All the rest will be spontaneous. There can be no abiding until there has been a real incorporation, and this brings us to where we can proceed to show how this union is effective.”

May the Spirit of Christ give to each who asks and desires a spirit of wisdom and discernment to live according to His calling and His purpose – and that we not fall short, or minimize His grace through indifference, spiritual laziness, ignorance, deception or any such thing. “Thy will be done!”

Addendum

In the forth-going discussion of *good works* both **inherently** good works and **benevolently** good works were discussed in some detail. These works must be considered *spiritual* for their origin is of the Spirit and not of natural man. But there seems to be a further aspect of *works* the Spirit wishes to bring forth – that of a more pure, more *fundamental* or foundational **spiritual** work.

In view of this more *fundamental spiritual work*, few Christians would consider their walk, or life in Christ, a labor. An exception might be one in full time ministry as a pastor, evangelist, or missionary. Even to this, however, the concept of *fundamental spiritual work* is incorrect. It is not the activities that bring the livelihood that is this *spiritual work*, that is one's vocation. This *spiritual work* is far less tangible – for it is *spiritual*.

The Christian walk begins effortlessly with a simple act of faith - “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”. Rm. 10:9. Something mysterious and miraculous happens within one's heart as new life is conceived. One is born again. This new life leads the new believer into spiritual activities such as prayer, Bible reading, and worship. Much of the walk thus far seems rather “automatic” – these things just seem to happen.

All in the Kingdom of God, however, is not so automatic. In this regard the Apostle Paul uses such terms as *strive, labor, fight, struggle, press, and work* when he discusses reaching towards God's highest. For example: “remembering without ceasing your **work of faith, labor of love**, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.” 1Thes. 1:3 Because this work is *spiritual*, it is intangible, it usually cannot be observed nor causes one to perspire. There remains yet a striving, or laboring of the inward man.

Three examples of this *fundamental spiritual work*, as applied to basics of the Christian life, are described below as the work of **faith**, work of **prayer**, and work of **love**.

The Work of Faith

“Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the **work of faith** with power.” Eph. 1:11

“The faith that receives from the hand of the Father is in two stages, and we are not to give up just because the struggle-and-labor phase does not produce the prize. ‘According to your faith be it done unto you.’ And, do not let us forget, faith begins by being a labor (Heb. 4:11) or fight (1Tim. 6:12), although it is consummated in a rest (Heb. 4:3). That is to say, the first stage of faith is always the battle in taking hold by the will, heart, and intelligence of some truth or promise which is not real to us in experience, and declaring it to be ours in spite of appearances. We do not appear to be dead unto sin and alive unto God. We are told to believe it, and so we dare to do so and declare so. A thousand times, maybe, faith will be assaulted and fall: unfaith will say ‘nonsense,’ and we shall belie our declaration for faith; but the labor of faith means that we deliberately return to the assault. Once again we believe and declare it. This we persist in doing. As we thus follow in the steps of those who ‘by faith and patience inherit the promises,’ a new divine thing will happen within us. The Spirit will cooperate with our spirit (as He is invisibly doing all the time), and to faith will be added assurance. Labor will be replaced by rest. The consummation of our faith has been reached (N. Grub).”

Following is a difficult word by Watchman Nee on the work of prayer. It is difficult because what it requires is not 'automatic', but requires a true pressing in and striving in our time of prayer. We should not just pray for our needs. The true meaning of prayer is for to the one who prays, "to pray for the fulfillment of the One to whom he prays." Prayer is the occasion to express our desire for God's will.

The Work of Prayer

"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." Eph. 6:18

God's purpose is for us to be so filled with His will that we forget our own interests. He calls us to work together with Him for accomplishing His will. The way of working together is prayer. For this reason He wants us to learn in Him what His will is regarding all things so that we can then pray according to His will.

True prayer is a real work. A servant of the Lord has well said: Prayer is the rail for God's work. Indeed, prayer is to God's will as rails are to a train. A locomotive is full of power but if there are no rails it cannot move forward a single inch. It may be able to go over great distances, yet it cannot go anywhere where no rails have been laid. Without any doubt God is almighty and He works mightily, but He will not and cannot work if you and I do not labor together with Him in prayer, *prepare the way* for His will, and pray with "all prayer and supplication" to grant Him the maneuverability to do so. Many are the things which God wills to do and would like to do, but His hands are bound because His children do not sympathize with Him and have prayed so as to prepare ways for Him. Let me say to all who have wholly given themselves to God: Do examine yourselves and see if in this respect you have limited Him day after day.

Hence, our most important work is to *prepare the way of the Lord*. There is no other work which can be compared with this work.

Watchman Nee, Let Us Pray

We must even broaden or deepen our understanding of Godly *love*. There is a somewhat passive love in the Greek called *philio* – a brotherly love that is of the emotions. One "feels" such an attraction to another. It is tolerant and quite forgiving. Actually, it requires no effort. Godly love, in the Greek called *agape*, goes beyond the realm of passivity and requires a conscience effort to care for someone in a proactive way. Sometimes, it involves a real (*spiritual*) labor.

The Work of Love

"For God is not unjust to forget your **work and labor of love** which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Heb. 6:10

How often does a believer want to feel a sense of love towards the brethren – much as an emotional attraction that automatically rises up within one's self. This may indeed occur between believers as a brotherly fondness (Gk. *philio* love). However, the higher fruit of love (Gk. *agape* love) into which believers are commanded is not so automatic but requires a spiritual work on behalf of the believer. And because it is not simple and easy, few actually press toward this kind of love.

This kind of (*agape*) love demands a giving up, a surrendering of our "comfort zone" and the engaging in actions and discussions that may prove most challenging and quite often stressful. We are commanded to truly care for one another (*agape* love) even if the fondness (*philio* love) is not in the present relationship. Even if fondness bonds two together, this spiritual work of love requires that we roll up our sleeves and face the issues in relationships that are difficult to face.

Life, both spiritual and natural, is much easier if we keep things light; keep the issues of the relationship superficial and simple. However, in the light of the Word, and the inward witness of the Spirit, when we begin to challenge one another's commitment, doctrine, behavior, defense mechanisms, attachment to self and self-centeredness, fondness to the world, and works of the flesh, that the true test of love begins. Truly caring for another means to passionately desire God's highest for them as well. It walks in the realm of godly righteousness.

Thus, the *fundamental spiritual work* of **faith, prayer, and love** are essential to our Christian life. If we desire growth and the furtherance of God's will not only in our life, in the lives of our loved ones, and in His Church (the Body of Christ) these works are most necessary. They do not happen automatically but must be pressed towards, strived for. And that is what makes them *spiritual works*.

We must all ask ourselves: "What is the measure of the call of God upon my life?" "What is my purposed destiny in Christ?" "To what degree am I willing to be so used of the Lord?" "How willing am I to undertake such works?" "What are the costs of such labor?" And, "what are the rewards?"

May God our Father, and Jesus Christ our Lord grant to us the grace, the strength, and the heart to press towards His high calling – both individually and corporately as His Church, His Body. May His Kingdom come.

This booklet is available upon request by writing to:

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October 2005