

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 213

Do Good Works Contribute to Salvation?

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Episode Summary

What is the proper biblical relationship between faith and works? Do good works contribute to salvation? If not, then why should we care about the way we live? Personal holiness is something taught in Scripture, but the desire to please God in our lives often leaves Christians guilty when they fail. Believers begin to suspect God doesn't love them any longer—or at least not as much. The result is that the clarity of the gospel gets muddled. This episode of the podcast aims to help us think clearly about grace, faith, and works in the Christian life.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 213: Do Good Works Contribute to Salvation? I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Well, today we're talking about salvation. I guess it's the number one topic, if there is a number one topic. It's kind of a big deal here. We've touched on good work several times, so I'm interested to see what you add to the conversation.

MH: Yeah, I mean this this keeps coming up, and this kind of grows out of the Q&A episode that we had after the book of Hebrews, because the book of Hebrews is just really so focused on believers staying in the faith. We often talked in our series on Hebrews (and, of course, in the Q&A) about how the emphasis there is to keep believing. It's not to do X number of works, then you sort of cross the finish line—you break the tape and then you're in. So the subject matter in Hebrews often lent itself to this conversation about faith and works and lapsing in faith. "Oh, does that mean I sinned—I committed a sin and now I lose my salvation?" Those kinds of discussions. So in view of the fact that we got questions about that in the Q&A, even after the whole series... And again, there were a few particular ones in there. I had made the comment in that Q&A that, "Boy, we need to just sort of devote an episode to this. This is that episode. And I'll be honest with you: having sort of run over this territory with a considerable amount of frequency in in the series on Hebrews and in other places, I didn't quite know how to structure this so that it would be sort of different. But I thought about that for 10 or 15 minutes, then I just sort of threw it to the wind and

abandoned it. What I'm going to do is we're going to just go through several propositions—idea statements—and then we're going to read a lot of scripture in this episode and focus on what the text says (that's what we try to do here) and sort out the faith and works things. So for many people, this is going to sound a little bit axiomatic, like, “Oh this is so obvious. Why would this even be a question? But for a lot of believers it is a question.

So if you're not struggling with this, don't check out. I can almost guarantee that you know someone in your church or your family or your circle of friends who does struggle with some of these things, and so you want to listen, direct them to this, pay attention, and share things yourself with other believers that you know.

So having set it up like that, our comments about works are really going to be focused primarily on post-cross work. In other words, the idea of working your way into heaven is pretty patently obvious that that's *not* what salvation is about. But we are gonna spend a few moments discussing that as we begin. But for the bulk of our time it's going to be on. “Well, okay, if works aren't about salvation then what's the point? Why do we care about living in a certain way? What's the whole point to this if it doesn't contribute to salvation? If it's not essential for salvation, then why do we bother?” That's where we're going in the episode.

Let's start with several propositions. Faith and works... I think at the outset we need to realize that faith and works are not rivals to each other. They should not be pitted against one another. And the latter (works) does not supplement the former, as though the former faith is somehow deficient—like, “You have really strong faith. You understand the gospel. You embrace it and believe it, but that's just not enough. That's deficient. That's not adequate. We need to add our works to that.” Again, those are those are ideas that in some circles might be fairly common, but I think it's easy to demonstrate that they're unscriptural.

5:00 So the first proposition... I would put it this way: scripture is absolutely clear that our works do not *merit*—and that's a key word—or *earn* God's grace and love. The fact that we do good works (or to use biblical language, “the works of the law”)... Our obedience to God is not what earns God's grace or earns God's love. Therefore, works for the Christian are not about earning merit before God to obtain eternal life.

Now, there's any number of passages that are going to be tracking on this. Let's just go to Galatians 2. We're probably familiar with verse 20, but that actually has a context:

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Okay, there's something that precedes it and there's something that comes after it. So if we go all the way back to verse 11... I said we're going to read a lot of scripture here, and we're going to do that. I'm just going to comment on things as we go. So if we go to Galatians 2:11, this is the Paul/Peter confrontation. Paul is speaking;

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles;

So Peter was enjoying meals/fellowship with the Gentiles. But when they came (these men from James), he drew back. Peter drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. He's afraid that Jewish believers (people who are Christians, most likely, but really into the law) were going to criticize him. So he shrank back—he drew back. He separated himself from the Gentiles. Verse 13:

¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas [Peter] before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

In other words, "Hey, you were buddying up with the Gentiles. That was fine. If it's okay (and apparently you believed it was correct before these other men came)... If you believed it was fine to do non-Torah-ish things such as fellowship and having meals with Gentiles, but now you've recoiled as though it's wrong, then where do you get the authority—or the even the coherence—of telling Gentiles that they have to live like Jews? You weren't living like a Jew. So which is it, Peter? Which is it?" And of course, Paul's point is that "You were right before. The truth of the gospel is that we don't need to do Torah-observant stuff. Again, these are issues of conscience. These are not issues of being right with God." Peter's the guy in the book of Acts who had the vision: "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." Peter says, "Oh, you know, I haven't eaten any of these unclean things my whole life." And God tells him, "What God has called clean do not call unclean," and the whole point is that this was preparing Peter for ministry to the Gentiles.

Well, Peter seems to have forgotten that, but Paul didn't. Again, Paul understood that theology and he confronts Peter about it. He confronts him. We continue with verse 15. Paul is speaking here.

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

In other words, "We're Jews and we don't do a lot of that stuff that the Gentiles do."

¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

10:00

I mean, I don't know how much clearer you can make it, and yet we have a lot of Christians who, for some reason (we're going to talk about those reasons today) somehow believe or are taught that they have to mix faith in Christ with works to keep God happy or make God happy. And they might say, "Well, I'm not doing that to have eternal life. I know the gospel. I know that salvation is not earned by works." Well, then, why do you insist on doing or not doing certain things, as though those are essential to have God positively predisposed toward you—to have God love you? Why do you think that? It's not a coherent thought. And we're going to come back to the old verse. You know it: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." We're gonna add a few... Ephesians: "While we were enemies, hostile toward God, God loved us showed grace toward us." Okay, those scriptural thoughts are incompatible with the notion that we have to do certain works or a certain amount of certain works so that God is kept smiling at us—so that God keeps loving us. It's just not true, yet this is what floats around in a lot of believers' minds, when you have clear scriptural statements to the contrary. And again, we'll talk about why that might be. Verse 17:

¹⁷ But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!

This is another way of saying. "Well, if we're justified in Christ then we can just do what we want." And then Christ is like the servant of sin. He facilitates sin. It's the same question as back in Romans here: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!" Paul says, and he says the same thing here. The ESV translates it "certainly not." It's *me genoito*, which is the same as it is in Romans: "God forbid." Verse 18:

¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Here's what comes after the verse that everybody memorizes. Here's what comes after Galatians 2:20. This one's just as important—maybe even more so. Paul says:

²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Again, I just don't know how much clearer it can possibly be. If you are believing, if you are thinking that your works (the works of the law) are what puts the grace of God over the hump—that the grace of God is going to fail unless we add your works to mix, in that the grace of God is deficient without your works, then you nullify the grace of God. And your theology says (even though your mouth might not) that Christ died for no purpose. Paul is blunt. He's clear, and we're going to talk about why, even with this clarity, people still get stuck on this. Here's another passage: Romans 3:27. This is Romans 3. Paul has spent the first two chapters talking about the Gentiles being lost in their sin and he talks about the Jews being in the same state, and how the Jews are kind of worse in some ways because they had the oracles of God. And then they're still separated from God because they need to believe in the gospel. They need to believe in Christ. So he says in verse 27, trying to convince now mostly Jewish readers to think clearly about salvation. He writes about doing works of the law:

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

He's talking about how we don't have any reason to boast because salvation is not based on works. The fact that salvation is by faith excludes our boasting because salvation is no longer dependent on our performance. Salvation in biblical theology is not merit-based. Verse 28:

²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Those are the Jews and the uncircumcised the Gentiles through faith. They're both justified the same way.

³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

The context of this is what Paul has been saying about the purpose of the law: to show us our failure—to show us that we needed grace, here in Romans 3. Going into chapter 4, Paul decides to illustrate the point with Abraham. Everybody knows who Abraham is. He's talking to the mostly Jewish audience.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.

It's what's owed him. In other words, if salvation is by works, then God owes it to you. If Abraham was saved by works—by his behavior, by his performance—then God *owed* him salvation. And Paul is denying this. His wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. In other words, the person who doesn't depend on his merit—his works—but believes in him who justifies the ungodly—he believes the gospel—his faith is counted as righteousness. It's the opposite of works, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works. Then he quotes the Old Testament:

**“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”**

⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.

In other words, Abraham was right with God. He believed before the issue of circumcision ever came up. Paul uses the circumcision illustration here because the Abrahamic Covenant was sealed with circumcision. That was the sign of the Covenant, and Paul's argument is that Abraham believed God before any of this circumcision stuff was even in the picture. That was the basis of salvation—not the work, not the deed, not the obedience that came afterwards. Verse 11:

¹¹ [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, ¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Now catch that Abraham is the father of both groups. According to Paul, he's the father of the Gentiles because salvation is by faith. It has nothing to do with

Jewish rituals. It has nothing to do with Torah observance. But he's also the leading figure for the Jew. Why? Because he believed prior to the circumcision. Salvation was by faith in both instances, and this is Paul's argument. So again, you look at this and think, "How in the world can this not be crystal clear?" I would say it is crystal clear.

We'll move on to the next proposition. Number two: scripture is absolutely clear that our works are not what causes God to love us or what keeps God loving us. Again, the go-to text here and I think it really is important, but we're going to consider some other ones. Here is Romans 5. I'll start in verse 6. Paul—the same epistle, writing to the Romans. He says:

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

"Weak" there is a common New Testament Greek term for "to be weak or sickly or diseased," or you have some malady. Our malady is, of course, sin—our separation from God.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

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Again—a reference to the resurrection. While we were yet sinners—while we were enemies—God showed his love for us. Christ died for us. By definition, God didn't wait for good performance to love us. Scripture states the contrary—the antithetical idea that while we were enemies—while we were in an adversarial position to God, he still loved us. While we were sinners—while we were doing all sorts of things that God is displeased with—God still loved us. John 3:16... I mean, it seems like everybody in the universe has heard this verse some time: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son"—his *monogenes*, his unique son—"that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." It doesn't say "whoever adds sufficient works while believing in him." It doesn't say "whoever works," okay? Works are not part of the equation. "Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The verse is not a mystery. The verse is crystal clear. There's no mystery here. In Colossians 1:21-23, Paul is speaking to Gentiles predominantly:

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Sounds like the book of Hebrews there: “You’ve got to believe.” Notice it doesn’t say, “Now you who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his in his body when he saw the change in your behavior. You were reconciled when you turned your life around, when you cleaned up your act, when you just... when you manage to do enough good works more than bad works, when you managed to contribute enough, then God said, ‘Okay, we’ll do the transaction now.’” It doesn’t say any of that. He has reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death, and because of that he’s going to be able to present you to God, if indeed you continue in faith. It doesn’t say “if indeed you continue to do enough good works, if indeed you continue to produce the quality of life that God is pleased with.” It doesn’t say that, folks.

The passages are clear. Ephesians 2... I’m going to beat this drum because this just keeps coming up. Paul again, in a different letter:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world...

You’re sinful. You’re following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, okay? You’re in Satan’s back pocket.

...following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

That’s who you are. That’s who you were. “But God, once he saw your change of life... But God, once he saw you clean up your act... But God, once he saw that you were serious about reforming yourself... But God, once he saw that you realized that you needed to keep kosher or do Torah or do X, Y, _____...” You fill in the blank with whatever you want and it’s going to be wrong because the text says:

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...

And he loved you while you were all those things in the first three verses.

25:00

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved...

I can't improve on what the New Testament says. How is it that we could possibly... I mean, if you read passages like this, how is it that we could possibly think that our works are an indispensable supplement to salvation? How could we think that our works are essential to God's positive disposition toward us? It's theological insanity, but it's common. We'll say a little bit more about it as we proceed, but just to kind of do a little sidebar here... For anyone who's redeemed—anybody who's a believer—we feel shame before God when we sin, but our shame should not be allowed to pervert grace. Our shame must not be parsed as proof that God now hates us or that he's lost love for us. If anything, our shame is proof that there's something about us that has changed, not that God has changed. To think or insist that works contribute to salvation means grace isn't enough. That's really the bottom line. That's what your theology is, regardless of what you say. If you're thinking that works are essential, that is your theology—that grace is not enough. I don't really care what comes out of your mouth. If that's what you're thinking, that's your theology. And it's not biblical theology, since the grace of God was shown to us through Christ's sacrifice. Then Christ's work isn't enough—that's what you're saying, and I would take you back to Galatians 2:21, which we just read:

For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Or Galatians 5:4:

...you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

And that's a problem. That's a problem because Paul's just saying you're not believing the gospel then. You have to believe the gospel—the good news. The good news is that Christ died on your behalf. God loved you. Christ gave himself for you, and your faith—your belief, your trust—in that is what matters. That's what matters to God. Your merit—your performance—doesn't play a role in this at all. Because if it did, then Christ's death is kind of pointless.

Third proposition: scripture is absolutely clear that since works do not amount to merit before God and are not what makes God love us, then works, therefore, must be a result of true faith—that validates true faith. So if works aren't the one thing, then logically they must be another thing. So if works are not about merit before God and not about earning salvation—if they're not about getting God to

love us... We're doing enough, "I'm active over here Lord! Pay attention so that you can look at what I'm doing so that you love me." If that's not what it's about, then works must be about something else, and the something else is that works are the *result*. Faith and works validate genuine faith. We could go back to Romans 5 now. We just read Romans 5:6-10, but the preceding verses get at this point. Paul says:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

30:00

Paul is getting at, "Look, we're already justified by faith, but when we respond, when we obey, and when we do the right thing in enduring suffering and the circumstances of life that produces character. It produces character". So works, behavior—what a person is behaviorally is going to be—is a byproduct in some way of responding to the gospel, and then understanding, as Paul says, that we stand in grace through faith. This world is not our home. We have eternal life, so life here really sucks, but this world is not our home. It's going to help us to endure and rejoice in our sufferings, and that produces character. Another way of looking at this (and sort of the primary passage/book for a lot of this is James... we talked about James in the last, you know Q&A)... Some of this is going to sound familiar from Episode 201 (our Q&A on Hebrews). We got into James, but I'm just going to repeat some of that and add a few other things because James is consistent with this idea that works validate real faith. Works are not a substitute for faith in James' theology. They validate faith. Faith is the essential ingredient for James, and I'm going to show you why that's the case here. James is famous in verse 17. James 2:17 says that faith without works is dead. If we have faith by itself, in other words... faith without works is dead. If faith is not alive—it's not genuine—then faith *with* works is real. It's genuine. In other words, works validate faith. They don't take faith off the table as a substitute for faith. Works don't eliminate faith. Works don't supersede faith. Works don't allow faith to be dispensed with. Works validate faith. If faith without works is dead, then faith with works is real. It's genuine and it's essential. It has to be there. Works validate true faith. The absence of works means the absence of genuine faith. That's why he's even talking about works. James is not talking about works to say, "Oh, that faith stuff... You don't need any of that. What you need is works. You need merit. You got to earn yourself..." No, that's not what he's saying. The only reason he's talking about works is because he wants to know if your faith is real. That's the only reason the discussion is even happening

in James. So this notion that he's doing this bait-and-switch kind of thing is just false. It's bad theology. It's a bad reading. It's an inept reading of the text. The only reason he's even into it is he wants to know, is your faith real? That's the question. James never says here or anywhere else that works are what saves. The primary issue for James is faith, not works.

Now, this can be shown by asking the question: What is living or dead? "Faith without works is dead," James says. That's what he actually says. He never says works without faith are dead. What James is concerned with... He's concerned with what? "I want to know you know what's living or dead." And what he's concerned about being alive—being real—is faith. His focus is still that. Even though his talk is about works, the only reason he's into the subject is he wants to know, "Is your faith real?" You can profess lots of things and if your life just doesn't show it then James is saying, "I have every reason to doubt that your faith is genuine." He's not saying, "You've got to realize that if you don't do enough work, you're not going to get to Heaven." That's not what he's saying. He's saying, "If I don't see works, then I just I'm not confident that your faith is real. I'm concerned about your faith. I'm not concerned about your tally of works. I'm concerned about whether your faith is real." Why would James be concerned about that? Because he knows faith is what saves. That's why.

I tried to illustrate this in the earlier Q&A. I said the absence of works doesn't say, "Oh crud. I just didn't work hard enough to merit eternal life. No, the absence of work says that faith isn't here. It isn't to be found. Can't find it. Works are not a substitute for faith; faith cannot be exchanged for works. Works show that faith is in the building. And I tried to use a couple... It's not exactly a syllogism, but I tried to use different vocabulary. So starting out with works and faith, I wrote and said this:

Works (that is, our actions) don't produce faith. Works don't replace faith. Works validate or demonstrate faith.

35:00

In other words, they show that faith is there—that faith is in the building.

Works are therefore necessary to show that faith is real. Their absence invalidates a claim that faith is in the building.

No, it's not. If faith is in the building, we would see works. He's talking about, "Is it living or dead? Is it here or not?" And what is *it*? Faith. Now, substitutes... I tried a few: "Let's do kind gestures and love." Same rule: relationships for faith and works. Kind gestures don't produce love, do they? No, they don't. Kind gestures don't replace love. Anybody knows this. Anybody who has a single healthy relationship knows that kind gestures don't produce love. They don't replace love. They're not a substitute for love. Kind gestures can validate love, though. If someone loves you, they will be kind. Kind gestures are necessary,

therefore, to show that love is real. Their absence invalidates a claim of love.

Let's try obedience and loyalty again. The same relationships: obedience doesn't produce loyalty. Obedience doesn't replace loyalty. You can obey without really being loyal, you know. You can do it grudgingly. You can obey, biding your time for the moment that you can strike back. You can take revenge. You can leave the building. You can leave home, whatever. These two are not the same thing. Obedience and loyalty are not the same thing. Obedience does not produce loyalty. It does not replace loyalty. But obedience can validate loyalty. Obedience is necessary to show that loyalty is real. How could you say you're loyal to someone if you never obey them? It's absurd.

Again: faith and works. We have to get these things straight. The only reason James is concerned with the works conversation is not because he's concerned, "I just want to know that you've done enough—that you've merited salvation. Oh, I'm concerned about that!" No, he wants to know if faith is real. That's why he's having the discussion.

Now a question: "In light of all that, Mike, can we just sin all we want now?" To echo Paul: "God forbid!" I mean, are you insane? But if Paul got the question, who are we to think that we won't get the question? Of course, we get the question, because Paul got it. Again, Romans 6 is sort of a fundamental passage for this. Let's go to Romans 6:15. Paul says:

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Me genoito: "God forbid." No way.

¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to...

Does he say *salvation*? See, up above, he says in verse 16... let me read it again:

¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

See people will read that and say, “Oh, yeah, he's talking about earning salvation.” Really? Really? Well, try reading down three verses. Verse 19:

¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to...

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He doesn't say “salvation.” It says “leading to *sanctification*.” Paul is not teaching salvation by works here. He's teaching that if you surrender yourself... You can surrender yourself to one thing or the other. You can do stuff that produces death, self-destruction, destruction of others, or you can serve God—serve Jesus Christ—and that will make you a righteous person. It's about doing right things, but he doesn't say in verse 9 that that leads to salvation. He says it leads to sanctification. It leads to becoming the kind of person God wants you to be. That's a normal way of putting sanctification. Theologians are like, “progressing toward holiness.” Okay, technically, linguistically, that's how you would say that, but let's just be real. Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Jesus. It's the process of imaging Jesus—imitating him—imaging Jesus, which, of course, is also imaging God. It's becoming more godly. It's becoming the kind of person that God wants you to be because he created you to image him and he gave you his son. Yes, so that you could have eternal life for what happened on the cross, but he also... I've talked a number of times on the podcast about how Christ is referred to as the image of God—the express image of God—and that we are being conformed to the image of his son—God's son. Jesus is the template for how to live. That's all this is saying. It's not talking about earning eternal life. And if you go on in Romans 6:20:

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Go live it up, okay?

²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

Just a suggestion—a profound thought here: if something leads to death (to self-destruction), it's not good and you shouldn't be enslaved by it. That's all Paul is saying. Verse 22:

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

You're going to become like Jesus. The sanctification is becoming like Jesus now, and ultimately (like 1 John says) when we are glorified we will be as much like him as we can possibly be. This is all Paul's talking about: imitating Christ and being conformed to his image. Why? So that he decides to put up with you? We can't obtain this perfection. We can't obtain perfection. Paul's language is that we are in Christ when all this this stuff about sanctification is going on. We are in him. We are united to him. We are part of his body. We are not just our own body now. We need to submit as slaves, not to the body of sin—our normal body—but to this other body that we're united to. This is Roman 6. Go back to the beginning of Romans 6 and just look at the language there:

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Again, this whole chapter starts with being in Christ, and it ends with this idea of progressively being sanctified—being conformed to the one whose body we are a part of. The body of Christ... being conformed to the image of Christ. And then ultimately, we're going to have eternal life, but not because of our own effort. It's because we're united to him. That's why we have eternal life. And when we get to that point, as John says and as Paul says in other places, we're going to be like him. We will be made like him. That's the end point. That's the terminus point for all of this.

Another question: if we're not just supposed to “sin it up now” (just do what we want), why should we care? Why should we put forth an effort? “Okay, you convinced me, Mike, and I'm not just going to go out and sin as much as I possibly can so that grace will cover it.” (That's the “God forbid” moment there in Romans 6.) “But hey, you know, I'm not going to put too much effort into the other either. Why, if I can't earn any favor with God? I'll promise God that I'm not going to go crazy on the sin side. But why should I bother with good works? Why should I bother? What's the point?” I would say there are several reasons why we should try to live a holy life. We should try to (as Paul just said in Romans 6) make ourselves a slave to righteousness. We already know we're not going to earn anything by that because God loved us while we were sinners—while we were enemies, while we were hostile, while we were in Satan's back pocket. God loved us despite all that. Our salvation is by faith because of what God accomplished through Christ on the cross. Okay, we get that. It doesn't really

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earn us anything. So why should we do it? There are several reasons. I'm just I'm just gonna throw out the first three here. Not in any particular order here.

Our works are a service to others. That's one good reason why we should care about how we live. Even though we don't earn brownie points with God, we should be a blessing to others. Our works make us a blessing to others, or a curse. We serve others or we don't. Our works make us useful for God's purposes or not. And you know why we should care? Because we're supposed to be imaging God. We're supposed to be being conformed to the image of Christ, who is the template—the perfect image, the perfect example. We're supposed to be disciples imaging Jesus. Imitating Jesus is the definition of discipleship. And we do that fundamentally in two ways. How would Jesus reduce this? If Jesus were here in the room and we said, "Hey, Jesus... How do we best imitate you? What do we do? Give us the grocery list." We know what he would say because he said in the Gospels that we should love God and love others. It's not that complicated. Jesus could actually... He even says that all the law and the prophets can be reduced to these things. That's why he gives that answer: love God and love others. In other words, relate to God the way Jesus did and relate to people the way Jesus did. Love God the way Jesus did. Treat other people the way Jesus did.

So again, those three things, not any particular order... Good works are about being a servant to others because Jesus was a servant to others. They should be about being a blessing to others because Jesus blessed other people. They should be about being useful for God's plan. And Jesus was certainly useful. He didn't get sidetracked. Well, just a few passages here. Let's go to Titus 3:3-8. Paul is talking to his audience and including himself here:

³For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy...

Good grief. It sounds like Facebook, actually. [laughs]

...passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

Why should we do good works? Believers should devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. It's serving people. It's living like Jesus lived. You go down to verse 14 and he sort of picks up the thought again:

¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

Let me put that little more negatively and say, “not be useless.” Doing good works puts you in the position of God being able to use you to serve other people and to bless people. If you're thinking that your good works are earning favor with God, you are distracted at best. You're distracted and you're really not imaging Jesus at that point. Hebrews 10:24 (and we saw this in our series):

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...

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Well, in the context of Hebrews 10, it was like, “Look, you stir each other up to live as you ought because there's mutual benefit in the believing community to doing that. If you're all sitting around waiting to die... If you're all sitting around and it's like, “Oh, the situation is just hopeless. Let's all of us just sit here and wait for death or something.” I mean, look, that's not accomplishing what God wants accomplished, either in terms of your own mutual benefit as a community or in terms of what you're supposed to be doing with the lost world. Fulfilling the Great Commission is not waiting for death. Ephesians 2:10... We have verses 8 and 9, which those are the ones everybody memorizes:

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Here's verse 10:

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

In other words, God has a plan. God has something in mind for each one of you. He really does—he has something in mind. And you were created in Christ. In other words, you were redeemed. You were saved for the purpose of good works. Works are a byproduct of salvation. Ephesians 4... again, a pretty famous passage. This is where Paul says that we are supposed to... verse 22:

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your

minds,²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

There's that idea of progressively imitating Jesus—progressively becoming more like him. At the end of the road, if we remain in faith, as Paul said (and Hebrews says several times), we're going to have eternal life. But we're also going to be maximally like him. We're going to be transformed upon our glorification, when we pass through the veil (however we want to put that). At the end of the road, when we join the council (Hebrews chapter 2), we are made fit for sacred space. That's the end point. Paul says in Ephesians 4:

²⁵Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Do you see a pattern here? He doesn't say (back up in verse 25), “Having put away falsehood, good you checked that box. And now that you've merited grace there, you've merited salvation. Good for you.” No, you live the right way, you put away falsehood so that you can speak truth with your neighbor. Good works are about blessing people—being usable to God within the believing community and to a lost world.

²⁶Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil.

Okay, you know what he doesn't say? “Well good, you checked off that box. That's more brownie points with God.” No, it's so that you don't become a tool of the dark side. You should be a tool of Jesus.

²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

So you can't do that if you're hanging on to the other things. Nowhere in the passage is, "Do all these things now and get them down and make a list and memorize it, put them in your on your iPhone or whatever. Make sure you chalk these off every day because then God will love you, because then God will be happy with you. God might give you the time of day." No, you do these things to bless others and to be useful to God. 2 Timothy 2... We'll just start in verse 20:

²⁰ Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use...

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This is just a metaphor. Paul saying to believers, "Look, if you're living a certain way, you're not going to be useful to God. You're not going to be a blessing to people. But if you live righteously, you will do those things."

²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. ²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Join the club here.

²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

Holy cow. [laughs] That's a gut punch for our culture today, and I'm speaking here of the believing community, not just the world.

²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness.

You know, I'll confess that I don't always do that. I have to remember this, too.

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Why should we live a certain way? To serve others because that's what Jesus did. To bless others because that's what Jesus did. To be useful to God because that's what Jesus did. And the answer to your question of "why do we do works," It's discipleship. It's to be like Christ. It's not to earn God's favor. It's not to supplement grace. It's not to put the cross over the hump. "Phew, the cross would have failed without my good work." No, no, it's none of those things. It's none of those things. Our works also play a role.

Let me just add the next thought here before for my I get lost here. I mean, it's all those things. Our works also play a role in turning other hearts to the gospel. I mean that's kind of a subset of being useful to God, obviously. Works are also about helping other people believe—showing them... making this faith that you're talking about something they want—something they know that they need. And also presenting your believing community as something that that they would want to be a part of because you've blessed them. You're a community this person knows they can go to for help. They know that you're going to help.

I'm just thinking here about Spokane. I don't know how many weeks ago it was now, but we spent a whole hour talking about how Jesus related to people. Jesus always told people the truth. When they were in sin, he didn't he didn't tell them they weren't sinning; he told them the truth. But somehow he made it impossible for them to conclude that he didn't care about them. That's really difficult, but that's the model. That's the template. It really is worth something in our culture. I mean, you hear all the time about how the younger generation doesn't like the church because they don't see authenticity. Well, the solution to that is not to lie to them. It's not to tell them that their sin isn't sin. Somebody in their life should have a high enough regard for them that they tell them the truth, but at the same time they also make it impossible to conclude that you aren't in their corner, as well. "Please don't destroy yourself with sin. If you do I will be here." It's a really difficult balance. And again, nobody's saying it's easy. Jesus is the template for doing that because he told people the truth, but somehow they kept coming back. The ones that seek him out are the ones who are leading the worst lives, and he's telling them. He's not saying, "Go live it up. I'm endorsing your behavior." No, he tells them the truth, and we have very specific episodes about this—people who were publicans and prostitutes and all. "They that are sick are the ones that need the physician," you know. Jesus says, "Well, the physician is going to tell them what's wrong. But the physician's also going to have the solution. The physician is also going to be there when they need help." It's a difficult balance, but he is the template for doing this. Just a couple of examples... You have 1 Peter 1:10-12:

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹²It was revealed to them

that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

There's some something to be said that you tell people what they need to hear even if they don't want to hear it, because when you turn out to be right... "Yes, what I was doing for five, ten, twenty years destroyed my life." We have to believe that God is going to... just like the prophets. Prophets are always telling people what they don't want to hear, but they were right. And people are going to remember who it was that actually told them the truth—who cared enough about them to actually tell them the truth. And the idea isn't that when that person comes to you later, you say "I was right, wasn't I?" No, that isn't what you do! You bless them. Philippians 2:14-15:

¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation...

See, right there... Let's just stop there. Paul isn't saying, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing that you can be perfect before God—that you can earn salvation. God just isn't going to have a gripe with you God's gonna have to let you in." No, he says:

¹⁴Do all things... without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

This is a personal note from Paul. Paul's not saying, "Do this so that you earn brownie points with God." He's saying that people need to see the light. They need to see in your life in this crooked and twisted generation. They need to see a little light in the darkness. And Paul's saying, "Look, if you do this, it's going to make me feel good. It's going to make me feel that that my ministry meant something." And it's a brief, fleeting, very human thing for Paul to say. But it's important: do these things to be light in a crooked and twisted generation. And if you do, God will use that. Titus 2:7-8:

⁷Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works...

Why? So that God loves me now? No:

⁷Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸and sound speech that cannot be

condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

The point of these verses is not so that you can win an argument. The point is not, “Hey Titus, do this so that in the end you can win the argument. You'll be the champion debater.” No, he's saying that right conduct will validate a true message. People will judge the message by the conduct of the person giving the message. If you live the right way, people will know that the speaker can be trusted. And that, again, is being light in the darkness—in a crooked and twisted generation.

So, you know, there are any number of examples that we could give here where the way you live impacts how people think about your message. And, of course, the answer to that isn't, “Well, okay, I won't tell anybody I'm a Christian. I'm not gonna give anybody the gospel.” Well, you know, thanks for bailing on the Great Commission. Thanks for ignoring that thing that Jesus said before he ascended that might have been important—his parting words that might have been important. [laughs] That's not the answer.

Of course, the topic for our discussion here is “why do we do what we do?” Can we do it to bless people? We do it to be useful to God. We do it so that hearts will be turned. We do it so that we don't invalidate the gospel—that we don't invalidate the message. Believe it or not, the way you live can turn people toward or away from eternal life. It really can. “Well isn't God's sovereign? God can bring somebody else along.” Yes, he can. He can bring somebody else along. He can he can do that. And God loves them, so he will. But see, now you've filed yourself in the bucket... when Paul talks to the Corinthians about suffering loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ. You may not care now. And it's not about being saved, but you will care when you see what your life could have meant and could have achieved in the big plan of God. That's what the Judgment Seat of Christ is about. It's not about getting into heaven. It's about seeing the role that you could have played and being rewarded for it. Even just knowing that the Lord is happy with something you did. We've talked about this in Q&A's before: everyone's going to suffer loss. Everyone's going to see where they fell short, but Paul also says that everyone who's at the Judgment Seat of Christ (those who are believers)... Everyone will receive some reward. The issue is that there will be some regret. You may not regret it now, but you'll regret it later, and it's not like God's happy: “Yeah, God gets to put the screws to you one last time before we have eternal life.” No, that's just twisted thinking. It's a motivation knowing that God wants to use you. God has plans. Ephesians 2:10 says you were saved for good works. God has plans for you, and for you to kind of blow it because you're human and dumb (like we all are), that's one thing. But for you to just say, “I'm just gonna make life easier for myself and not put myself in these situations where I might have to say something about Jesus, or I might have to help somebody. I might have to be Jesus to somebody. I'm going to try to avoid that.

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I'm gonna eat Doritos here and sit on my couch all day long... “ That's just being useless. Again, you may not care now, but you will care at some point. You'll regret it, is what I'm trying to say. You'll regret it. The Lord will comfort you, but you'll regret it. Nobody wants to deliberately heap regret on themselves. If you're in that camp and you've got some sort of pathology.

Another thought here: our works are our representation of God—representation of Christ. Again, works are directly related to imaging and representing God, which in turn is directly related to being a follower/disciple of Christ. Christ is the highest expression of imaging God. I want to go through these verses real quick and then we'll hit one last question. 2 Corinthians 4:4... Think about this. When you ask yourself or you hear somebody ask, “Well if works don't earn me anything, why should I do them?” The short answer—the one-word answer—is: discipleship. It's imitating Jesus. Then you can expand on bigger ideas, like that God saved you actually to do something. He has something in mind for you, and your works will either get in the way or facilitate that plan. Be like Jesus. Be a blessing. Be useful. Be helpful. Honor God. The person who is seeking the gospel seeking truth... They're going to see your life and be led toward it or away from it. These are important things. But again, Jesus is the primary example. Jesus does all these things perfectly. He attracted people to the truth. People couldn't leave a conversation with him with the impression that he doesn't really give a rip. He is the perfect example. So you have 2 Corinthians 4:4. Paul says:

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

He is the perfect representation—perfect representative. If you're familiar with this podcast, you know about the concept of imaging: imaging God is representing God. Romans 8:29:

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...

That's your destiny: to be conformed to the image of his son—being made more like Christ. That's God's plan for you, ultimately. Colossians 3:10:

¹⁰ ...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

There's that Imaging language again. 2 Corinthians 3:18:

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Again, this transformation into the image of God—the image of his son. 2 Corinthians 7:1:

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Now, notice he doesn't say, "Let's clean ourselves up from every defilement of body and spirit in order to obtain the promises—in order to get eternal life." He doesn't say that. "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves." And this is the motivation: bringing holiness to completion. We progress toward being conformed to what Jesus is. 2 Timothy 2:19:

¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

1:10:00

In other words, let's have people see you and make that a positive reputation-builder for Jesus. I think the reputation of Jesus has suffered a bit in our culture. Honestly, it's because of Christians. In some cases, people are offended at our theology—I get that. But there are any number of cases where we've given Jesus a bad reputation, and by doing so we've given God a bad reputation by our behavior. Behavior has nothing to do with God loving us. He already loves us while we were yet sinners, while we were enemies. While we were the other—the grocery list—God loved us. But it has a whole lot to do with what the lost think about Christ. It has a whole lot to do with that.

One last question: Why are these concepts, which are so clear in scripture, such a struggle for so many believers? I think there are several reasons.

This is no particular order, and part of this is I'm going to be speaking to pastors here. This is just sort of right off the top my head here—right off the cuff. I think that even though they're clear, some people don't know them well. Something being clear in scripture and someone really knowing what scripture says are often two different things. It really takes a concerted effort to grasp the content of scripture. And this subject matter (the relation of faith and works) is like anything else. That's the good part. Put a little more negatively, let me ask this question: Do you know this subject matter—the relationship of good works to grace and faith to salvation? Do you know that subject matter with as much thoroughness

as you do other things? Another way of asking is: what are the things in Scripture that you really invest time in? Do you really invest time in this theological issue?

I've met so many... I can't think of anybody directly because people who usually come to my events aren't so invested in one particular thing. So I'm going to just make a sweeping generalization. I know by experience... I know by internet stuff and by going to different conferences and just lurking... I know what I'm going to say here is going to hit home to somebody, and I hope it does. I'm not apologizing for it. I hope that it does. Do you know this material as well as you know things about prophecy? Being an expert in prophecy and being kind of dumb when it comes to the role of the relationship of faith and works is not a good thing. The relationship of faith and works is more important than prophecy. Maybe it's demons. Maybe it's angels. Maybe it's... whatever. There are just a lot of people who get absorbed in certain subjects and then they struggle and it harms them in many ways. They struggle with the whole faith and works thing. Can you defend your view of the rapture more readily than navigate the grace and works issue? If that's the case, that's sad. If you know more about the ashes of the red heifer or Gog and Magog than grace's superiority to the law, I pity you, because there's just nothing more important than understanding the gospel with clarity. "Well, yeah, a five-year-old can understand that and get saved, Mike." Have you been listening? Okay, have you been listening? There are Christians everywhere—in your family in your church in your circle of friends—who can spit the gospel back to you. They know the verses. But they struggle with shame and guilt when they fail. Somehow the clarity of the gospel gets muddled in their minds. They are influenced by their emotions, by their feelings, by their guilt. And all of a sudden the clarity of the Gospel morphs into, "I better buck up so God loves me." That is a problem. And again, if you know all this arcane stuff that by and large is a lot of speculation, let's be blunt about it... If you're a master of those domains and you can't help somebody with this one, I not only pity you, I pity them. It's just a misplaced priority.

Another thought here. Why do we have this problem? I would say that in some cases we have preaching that is innocently misguided. I'm speaking to pastors here. In other words, one job of a pastor is to be sort of like an Old Testament prophet. Prophets were covenant enforcers. Prophets reminded people about how they should be living. Pastors have that job, too. Pastors are to exhort the flock to follow Jesus to live like him—to follow his example, all these things. They're to exhort people to love God and love others—to be holy. Okay, that's legitimate. But sometimes I'd say (maybe even, unfortunately, many times) preachers fail to emphasize grace in equal measure when pointing out sin and failure. Sometimes, unfortunately, people are left to wallow in shame and guilt inside, which in turn makes them doubt that God loves them. Grace has to be given the high status. It deserves the high status it has in the gospel message and that it always will have in New Testament preaching.

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Pastors might say, “Well, that makes me uncomfortable. I'm almost kind of afraid to do that because people will probably abuse it. They might think, ‘Well, it doesn't matter how I live. I could just go do what I want.’” In other words, you'll be like Paul. I've got news for you: if Paul had this problem, you're going to have this problem, because Paul did. But knowing that this problem is out there—that somebody out there is going to think badly, think poorly, and draw this conclusion... Knowing that's the case is not permission to distort New Testament theology by obscuring grace. It just isn't. It doesn't give you permission to do that. You owe people the truth of the whole counsel of God. And I would say, pastors have a tough job. We'll add this to my list of why I couldn't be one, which is kind of long, but I would also encourage pastors and not rebuke them, but encourage them to stop presuming that the Spirit can't clean up a mess. Yep, people are going to draw the wrong conclusion. They're going to do just what the people that Paul had in mind when he said “shall we continue in sin that grace may abound”... You're going to get those people. But the Spirit can clean up messes. Stop presuming it's your preaching that sanctifies people. It's the Spirit of God that sanctifies people. It's not your preaching. Your job is to tell people the truth of scripture, not to turn people into what they ought to be. Only the Spirit of God can do that and prompt people to make decisions about their behavior.

It's part of sanctification. Sanctification is assisted when you tell people the truth about how they should live. People need to hear that, but I think preachers can get trapped into feeling like failures themselves and then they sort of go overboard in one direction. They feel like failures when their people aren't godly. That's understandable, but you've got to realize that a lot of that... If you're doing the job and telling them the truth (telling them the things they need to hear), then you need to leave the rest to the Lord. That's God's job That is not in your job description. You've accomplished your job description. You have told people the truth and that means telling them about their sin. It also means telling them about the love of God—the grace of God. And in this case, showing them what scripture says about why we should live holy lives—why Scripture does talk about this a lot. And it's not about merit. It's about being useful, being a blessing, so on and so forth—imitating Jesus.

Another one, and this is a little less innocent (and yes, I have experienced this in life): sometimes you have pastors who intentionally guilt people and like it. I mean, there are those people out there. Preaching about sin and about holiness becomes a control mechanism. Pulpit manipulation, to be honest with you, isn't that hard. It's a skill that I've actually seen cultivated by people, and it's alarming. It's one of those things that just makes my blood boil, but it's out there. People do that. It's dishonest, actually. It smacks of sort of the caricature... I guess at the time historically it wasn't a caricature, but it's like medieval Catholicism holding withholding the means of grace in that theology to move herds of people (or just the important ones) to get them to do what you want. It's just manipulation. Non-Catholics are just as guilty. If we go back in the Middle Ages or wherever it happens (it can of course happen now)... But our culture has been sufficiently

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paganized that lots of people who are Catholic don't care what the church says about most anything. So it doesn't happen that often. We on the on the Protestant side—the Evangelical side—are actually better at this than that situation, unfortunately. This is just wrong. It's just wrong to go the other direction where you preach in a certain way to make people think that not only do they have to do certain works so that God's happy with them, but they have to build *you* up as the leader as the “Poo-bah in the pulpit,” that they have to serve you so that God's happy with them. I've seen that and I've had plenty of conversations with people around the country who've seen that, too. Being as kind as I can, that's just dishonest. I mean, it's wicked when you come right down to it. I would say this kind of manipulation is one reason why every person in the pew needs a certain command of scripture. You have to hold the people in the pulpit accountable. You just do. And if they are good people they'll appreciate that. They'll know that that is a ministry to them because you're all there. You're all equals. You're all images of God. You're all members of the body of Christ, so on and so forth. People who are sincere about ministering to you, they will not mind that your watchful eye... Again, if they know that you have their best interest in mind. It works both ways... works two ways.

Last thought here. I would think that one of the reasons why people struggle with... This is the fourth thing I'll throw it out. Again, these are in no particular order, but just things I've experienced either myself or I've seen. I think one other reason—the last reason—why people struggle with this even though scripture is quite clear is that we assign more validity to our guilt than we do to God's grace. Bottom line, that's what you're doing. If that's you, I want you to think about this in a different way. If you know you're just like, “I just feel so guilty and I know God loves me, but I just, if... I just keep coming back to my feelings.” What you're doing is you're assigning more validity to your guilt than God's grace. And if that's you, you have a problem with biblical authority. That might be a new way of looking at it, but that's what we've got here. You've made yourself, your inner life, or your feelings a higher authority than scripture. And what you need to do is believe the truth more than you believe your feelings. To which one of those two things are you assigning more worth? This is going to sound trite, but I actually mean it. I think it'd be a good exercise to repeat Romans 5:8 to yourself every day when you wake up, every night before you go to sleep, and throughout the day. Make it a reflex thought: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Your opinion of yourself is not superior to God's opinion of you. Let me repeat that: *your opinion of yourself is not superior to God's opinion of you*. If you're making your opinion superior, again, you have a problem with biblical authority. God knew you while you were yet a sinner, while you were yet an enemy, and he still loved you. So regardless of how you feel, that's true. So which of the two things are you embracing? The only thing in the way of letting the truth rule in your heart is you! You've got to get out of your own way, and it's an issue of biblical authority. To which of those two things are you assigning more value—your feelings or what God says?

Now, to sum up, what I'm hoping people get out of this is that there are a lot of good reasons to do good works. There are a lot of scriptural reasons do good works—to live a holy life as a Christian. Earning God's love is not one of them. God loved you while you were his enemy. His love cannot be earned, and it's time to accept that and live accordingly. And when you fail—when you're ashamed—remember he loved you, even when you weren't ashamed. He hasn't changed and he never will.

TS: Mike, I think we've pretty much got salvation and good works wrapped up. But can you speak about the different degrees of reward in heaven that is based on our good deeds?

MH: Yeah. Boy, there you go. [laughs] That's another episode. Is that another episode?

TS: Do you want to do full episode on that?
I'll mark it down. I mean if you want to give us a quick summary, if you can, and we can put it down.

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MH: Ultimately, that question is related to how we conceive about life in the new creation, because it's going to involve... If we have the new creation, which again—Heaven is really the new creation and that's what we're doing. We're restored back to the Edenic state. There's lots of things to do and, by definition, that requires different kinds of jobs—different kinds of duties. And I don't think any of them will be onerous or burdensome because hey, it's Heaven. It's the new Earth. Okay? It's everything as it should have been. So I tend to think that a question like that—degrees of reward—is really about the kinds of tasks or things that we do in the new Earth. And you could look on the other side and say, “Well, who cares? I'm there! I'm gonna like it. Anyway, it's not going to be awful.” And that's true. But there's going to be hierarchy there, just by definition. I think more of the (if I can even use this this phrase)... More of the unfortunate side is actually about the Judgment Seat. It's knowing what our failures were. But again, that's going to yield to the wonder of what the new life is. So I don't know if there might be an episode in that. I don't know, I'll have to think about it. But it's not that some people get good jobs and other people are going to hate their jobs in Eden. It's Eden, okay? It's going to be wonderful, no matter what. But I think that the suffering loss issue is a big part of this. But once you get in there, it's true that you're in, so I think if there's a negative part of this it's just knowing... Not necessarily a point of dissatisfaction of what my eternal state is going to be. It's just knowing that in this life, by virtue of the reward issue—the reward ceremony, if you want to call it that... It's knowing that you disappointed the Lord in some way. I think that's really what's at the heart of using that kind of reward language for motivation.

TS: All right. Well, I'm going to mark that down, Mike, because I would love for you to do a full episode.

MH: Yeah, we'll put some thought into it.

TS: Yeah that'd be great. All right. Well great. Hopefully we have an episode down that people can refer to for reference. So hopefully we have an episode now that's dedicated to that, where people can point to and share. Hopefully, if there's somebody out there, like you said, that is struggling with this, they will come across this episode, Mike, and hopefully have some peace.

MH: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think we've all been there at one point or the other. I know I was at one particular point in my Christian life, a few years into it. Part of it was my circumstance, but part of it, honestly, was I had to yield my feelings to truth. I had to give up winning the argument, valuing my feelings more than what God said.

TS: All right. Well, we hope all of our listeners share this episode and help our fellow Christians out there who are struggling with this subject, since salvation is the number one priority. Please, please, please, please, please share it and give it to people who need it. And I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.