

Good Works--God's Design for Christians

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In Pilgrims Progress, the Christian is given certain information, instruction by one of the characters, the Evangelist, or someone else. And he says, these things do make me both hope and fear. And I feel the same way when I come to the Bible, particularly the writings of Paul or the sayings of Jesus. They do make me both to hope and to fear. They both encourage me and make me ashamed.

I am ashamed, for instance, that the man Paul, in prison could write a letter, a brief letter. I think probably, well, it would easily go on two typewritten pages. And yet, pack it so full of truth that it takes me weeks to go over it, and then, I don't hope to get everything that's there. For instance, this morning in the third chapter of Titus, or that's the book I have been preaching from in the mornings as you know and unto which I now refer, the third chapter of Titus, the eighth verse there is a little line in the saying which he simply threw in, Paul just threw that in. If anything, it's inspired, can be said to be thrown in. I do not mean to slight what he said, I only mean to say that to him, this obviously wasn't a critically important thing. And yet, I find that I can't get by it. I have to preach a whole sermon on it. Here are the words: These things are good and profitable unto men.

Now, Paul I say, put that in as a kind of salty saying, and yet, it gives me material for a whole talk. That's humiliating to me to know that the man of God as he was inspired by the Holy Ghost, can put into a few words that which takes me a whole sermon to fathom.

Well, here we have the saying, these things are good and profitable unto man. Now, what things? Possibly these things that men might be careful to maintain good works, but more likely, all these things from chapter two verse one on, where Paul says, speak thou the things which become sound doctrine, for these things are good and profitable unto men. He said that aged men were to live gravely and temperately and patiently. Aged women were to live in a way that becometh holiness. Young women were to be sober, discrete, keepers at home, good and obedient. Young men were to be sober-minded, that workmen were to work as Christians, and all on down he tells us how we're to live. And then says, we're to be subject unto principalities and powers and obey magistrates. Then he says, and then, another thing I want you to keep saying is that everybody that believes in God should be careful to maintain good works. And then, he sort of adds it up at the bottom, because these things are good and profitable under men.

I know that you don't want a lesson in semantics, nor do you want a lesson in English, but let's look a minute at that word, good. These things are good. The word good has a long list of meanings

in the average dictionary, because it's one of those workhorse words that you can get on and ride anytime, and because it just means so many things. But here, the thought of morality is not present. When he says these things are good, he doesn't mean these things are morally good, virtue. They are all right, I suppose if things can be, but that isn't what he means. What he means is, these things are valuable to you. These things are to your advantage and profit. That's what he means by good. You'll find exactly the same Greek word we have in our English, but the same original word where it says, some fell into good ground.

Now good ground wasn't ground, morally good, virtuous. A hunk of earth can't be morally good. A turned-over sod can't be virtuous. But it means valuable and profitable. There is soil so worked out that you can plant something in it, and it will either not come up at all, or if it does, it will be a scrub and it will produce practically no fruit at all. There's other ground you can see it as you go, say, take a train here and go through Indiana and Ohio. And if you go through, you'll see the great black fields. Now, those fields were originally buffalo fields probably. And the buffaloes beat with their hoofs over the centuries down into the ground, the reeds and rushes and grass and weeds until it's literally alive with power and fruitfulness. The result is, they can grow almost anything over there. The great truck farms, that's at least one of the places where we get our onions and lettuce and tomatoes that we serve on our tables all over the United States. That's good ground, although it's not morally good. The idea of virtue isn't there.

Then we say, they bringeth forth good fruit. There are trees that bring forth fruit that can be eaten, good fruit, profitable fruit. Then, there are trees that bring forth only lumpy, small, sour, wormy fruit that's no good. And we have the same, where Peter said, Lord, it is good for us to be here. He didn't mean this is a morally holy place. He meant it's advantageous. It's a good thing for us. This is a great place to be.

Now, with that definition, I've gone way around Robin Hood's celebrated barn to get to the meaning. And now, let's apply that meaning a little. Say, suppose there's a sick man and the doctor says to him, now, you take this treatment. It won't be pleasant, but it'll be good for you. You will be well in 10 days. That is a good thing. It's good in the sense that it is advantageous. It's profitable to me. You'll get well if you take it. we say to a starving child, here, eat this, this will be good for you. The child eats it. It nourishes the little body and pretty soon the eyes begin to shine again and the color comes back into the face. The good food that is advantageous, profitable food, has made the little ones healthy again.

We say to an intelligent young man, it is good for you that you should finish high school. And he comes around again and says, now I'm finished high school, what shall I do? And we say well, you're intelligent, I believe you're college material, it's good for you. Go on, go on to school and learn. We mean not that the college is going to be a morally good place, although it should be that certainly true. But we mean if you study certain subjects, they will profit you. So, that's what Paul

meant when he said, these things are good and profitable unto men. In other words, God always has the good and the profit of people in mind. If you could just put that down. And after you've heard that, then if we dismiss and you go home, if you remember that and take that with you and hold that as a tenant of your faith, it will help you in this wicked old world?

Almost everybody that comes to us, comes for their own profit. They come to you and these things are good and profitable unto them. If somebody comes to your door selling you something, and it's because, why if he can make a sale, it'll be good and profitable unto him. But he's not thinking about you. It is so with everything. They sing anthems about cigarettes now. And that's because it's good and profitable unto the man who is selling the cigarettes; that it gives the man who smokes his lung cancer. That means nothing to them. He'll have a son who will be ready by the time the old man dies of lung cancer, he'll have a son whom he's taught to smoke the dirty things and he'll be and his family will be good. They know it's good and profitable unto them. But it's wonderful to hear it turned around and to hear it said, God always thinks of that which is good and profitable unto us. That when God approaches us with an exhortation, a command, He never comes saying, this will be good for me, but this is good for you. This will be good for you. The whole book of God is like that.

When we rise to the everlasting; when we rise to the eternal, how beautiful and how solemn it all is, so that sick man, though he takes that treatment and gets well, he'll later die, notwithstanding. And if the starving child eats the food and gets it's health back, it will die after a while too. The students will wither away and cease to need the learning that he with such great pains managed to get at the college or university. So that's only for time. We say, go ahead, eat, drink, take care of yourself, learn, read, think. These are good and profitable things. But we realize that we're thinking in time and talking in time. These things are good and profitable for time.

But when God speaks to a man, He says these things I say to you are good and profitable to you forever. God always thinks in terms of eternity and thinks forever. Isn't it a solemn and a wonderful thought that you have in your bosom that which time can't wear out? Isn't it wonderful that you have in your breast that which the passing of the century cannot diminish or that cannot grow old with the passing of the years?

One of these times when people get back and we're settled again. We are in our three worst Sundays of the year. But when we get around that we'll have our people with us, I'm going to start a series, oh, I'm going to call it, A Journey into God. But then, before I get to that, I want to preach a sermon called, "The Space Age Seen from Above." I've heard enough about this space age, and I can only take things so long. And I've been kicked around enough about the space-age view. And I'm going to reply now, a Christian is going to reply. What about this space-age business and I'm going to think from the throne down. And when you think from the throne down brother, you're not the slightest bit worried about vanguards or any of the rest. If they blow up or go up, it makes no

difference. Because, you're thinking from the throne down, but I won't preach my sermon. I will wait for the time. And you'll come and hear it.

Now, think about the eternal soul of a man. Here he is, what's space to that man? What's time to that man? What's space or time to that man? What matters to that man? What motion and law and attraction and gravitational pull and zones of radiation and empty space? What's that to the man? God Almighty made him of a different material altogether. He lives differently. He's of another matter altogether. It's nothing to him.

So, God says now here, I've given you that which cannot wither, which cannot die, which cannot cease to be at any rate. And what shall it profit you to gain the whole world and lose your soul. God made the earth and He made man upon it. And He wills the good of that man. God's will vigorously, actively wills the good of that man. If we could get ahold of a half a dozen great ideas and they begin to then get ahold of us, it would change our whole outlook.

One is that God is not passive and sluggish waiting to be stimulated, but that God is the active aggressor, waiting for us to recognize Him. If we could only see that, that God wills actively and aggressively my highest good for the longest time. And he says these things are good and profitable. He means, this will be advantageous to you while the ages roll. This will profit you as long as the stars burn and when I've wiped them out as a child wipes out a picture off a blackboard, you'll still be there eternally profiting by these things. Now, God means the fullest development of my soul and He makes appropriate preparation for it, beyond death and beyond the resurrection and in the heaven above and in the fellowship of God forever.

Now, good and profitable. I think these words could be written over everything that God ever said or did in His relation to man, this is good and profitable for you. If God's children would only find that out and stop fighting. You know, there's a little saying in the world, they say don't fight it. It sort of a cute little saying people have. Well, don't fight it. And so, they just give up to the deal whatever it happens to be. But if we could only remember that the will of God is not something to fight, but something to accept joyously, it would change our whole lives.

When God made Eden, He made a garden eastward in Eden. And He said there to the man, now this is good and profitable for you. And He put the man in there and said, this is good and profitable. And he made certain fruits and he said, now these are all for you. Look at them hanging there, all these trees. Here's one. Don't bother that. For my own reasons I have proscribed that, but all the rest of the garden is yours. And these things are good and profitable for you.

And then, when man had disobeyed and sinned, God cast him out of the garden, and why? Because it was good and profitable for him that he should not remain in the garden and eat of the tree, that would fix him like a photograph plate so that he never could change. God puts a man out where he

could be fluid and malleable and changeable, so God could get hold of him and change him back from his sinful state, back to his back to holiness.

So, God drove him out of the garden. And of course, man mourned. In his trip out of the garden, Milton shows Adam and Eve hand in hand walking away from the gate of the garden, looking pensively back over their shoulder at what had once been their happy home. And then, hand in hand they went out into the world. But it was good and profitable for them that they should. That's always God motto, this is good for you. This is profitable for you.

And then, come all down through the Scriptures, when God instituted sacrifice, and redemption. He said, here slay this animal. Put the blood on the altar. Confess your sin, for that's good and that's profitable for you. Later on, when the time came, Mary, as the little song says had a baby. And they named his name Jesus. All across the world, God wrote, this is good and profitable for you. This is good and profitable, and when Jesus opened his mouth and taught them, it was to their good and their profits. And when He died on a cross, if they'd had eyes to see, they could have seen written in letters of fire: this is good and profitable for all men, for God means it always to be so.

It is the devil's libel that God looks upon men seeking to find fault and to punish and to harm. The devil brought that dirty, scandalous libel to Eve and got her to sin and he's been telling everyone of Eve's children from that hour to this, their sits God on the throne, the great bully. And your weak and helpless and short-lived, and He's got eternity to throw His weight around. And so, they turn the minds of people against God forgetting that God gave man free will and said this is good and profitable for you. God gave man the world and said it's good and profitable for you. God sent His Son to die and raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand and said this is for your profit. This is for your good. If we can only remember that and know that always God is thinking of our good and our profit.

Let's suppose it's a little baby. Let's think it's a little baby. There he lies, or she. There they lie face down, cheeks red, hair, one sock kicked off, the other one still on. Indeed, in restful, healthy, slumber. And the parents pass by and tiptoe in and see. What do they think about? And they go out again smiling. Are they going to plan how they can get him? How are they going to harm him? Are they going to sit out in the living room and plan the blocks, the hindrances they can put in his way? Are they going to teach him evil and harm him? No. You know better than that. Every father that's normal, the abnormal few, I can't tell you about them.

But every normal father thinks about his family, every normal father. Well, I remembered, this wasn't a spiritual thing to do, but it was a perfectly normal thing to do. If I would have been more spiritual I wouldn't have done it. But being just where I was, I did it. And it was perfectly normal. I used to think of my six boys. And they used to think if I should die or something should happen to

me, what would happen to them. And I used to wake up in a state of panic way back there, I got over it, but it was normal. I was thinking of the welfare of those boys.

And every normal father or every normal mother thinks only of the welfare of their children. And if ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly father give good things to those that ask Him? Because God is aggressively determined that He will give you that which is good for you; that which will profit you the longest time.

So, God sends these things to us, the promises, the warnings, the exhortations. There they are. Some of them are pretty severe. But if you will notice and read the fine print, you will see there, this is good for you. This is profitable for you. And then when it comes to the things we don't like, sorrows and pain and loss and tribulations, nobody ever will love them yet. Nobody ever rushed headlong into pain deliberately yet. Even the man who takes a gun and puts it to his temple knows he's going to cause himself sharp pain, but it will only be for an instance and his pain will be over, so he thinks though he's trying to escape pain, not trying to run into it. And yet, when God allows them to come, he says, this is good for you, and I'm thinking of your profit.

Did you ever have anybody in your family take piano lessons. You know, the easiest thing in the world, is to get them to start and the hardest thing is to keep them at it. The easiest thing in the world. It's a romance, Oow, I'm going to take piano, so off they go. And for the first week, you can hardly get them loose from the piano. Second week, they take off. The third week, you have to keep reminding them. The fourth week, threatening them. And then after that if you've got good sense, you call the whole thing off. Because you know, if you have to drive into the piano, they'll never be a Horowitz anyway. Well, the point I'm trying to make is that God has to make us do some things sort of. I know we're free will. But sometimes the Lord puts a little pressure on. And when we look up into His face questionly, He says, now this is good for you. This is profitable for you.

When I was a small boy, I used to have the unfortunate habit of picking apples off the tree before they were ripe and eating them, with the result that you can easily get, but which I for certain reasons I'm not going to go into. And of course, I'd be sick. I'd be in bed, cramps and miserable. And my mother would go to the doctor. Now personally, I think that probably the doctor gave the same powders. They tasted the same and looked the same no matter what I had for the first 14 years of my life. The same doctor brought me into the world, fed me this white powder. And I think it was probably the same stuff. But at least the point was, my mother thought it was good for me and so she made me take it. It was bitter. The idea in that day was, the worst it tasted the better it would be for you. I think that that probably was taught in the medical schools at that time. Now, I don't know whether that's true. But I do know this that sometimes God gives you bitter medicine and you might just as well face up to it. It's a modern notion that Christianity is one huge Sunday school picnic with a swim thrown in. It's all wrong.

The Christian life is a reasonably happy life and if you live close to God, a very happy life. But a life shot through and through with sorrows and hardships and pains and tribulations, and these sorrows and tribulations are not God's highest will, for they're not going to be any of them in heaven. But in this mixed up world where we are now and with us in the shape we are, they're necessary tools. So, the Lord gives us the bitter medicine and says, now this is good for you. This will be good for you. Take it and thank me for it. It's good for you. Now, he says, good works, good works, that God's people should maintain good works. This is good for you. Do it. Do it.

I want to ask you a couple of questions and then I'm going to close. I want to ask, why is it, that it's so hard to get people to do the things that are good for them and so easy to get them to do what's sweet and pleasurable for them whether it's good for them or not? I wonder why? Why is it hard to get people to do the things that are good for them? Why is it so easy to get people to do the things they like to do? Even though they know they're not good for them? Why is it that when it's a choice between the flesh and what's good for us, ninety-seven times out of 100 Christians will choose the flesh? Why is it when God gives a choice between time and eternity, the vast overwhelming number of people will choose time? Why?

Let me give you an example of what a fool man can be, choosing the immediate short range profits instead of the long range profit. I came out of the United States Army as a young man. The United States government at that time had on every one of their men, they had a \$10,000 insurance policy. One day, I got a letter from the government as all us men did. The letter said this. Now, you can take your choice, we will give you, I think it was \$150 veteran benefits, now in cash. Or we will give you your paid up policy for life. We'll just hand it to you. You don't have to pay a dime and it's yours. If you live to be 108, when you die, your relatives will get \$10,000. I was a young struggling preacher in my first pastorate, getting about \$3.48 a week as a salary. I was superintendent of Sunday School, the janitor, chairman of the board and was the board and was just generally everything. What I didn't do, my wife did the rest. And you know what I took? I took the short range \$150 instead of the \$10,000 I might have had this government to pay my descendants.

Now, that's an illustration. God says, now, you can have your chooce, time or eternity. Get the short range thing or take the long range thing and wait for it. Almost every time we take the short range pleasure and lose the long range benefits. Why? Why is it when it's a choice between God and the flesh, almost every time the flesh wins and God loses? Why is it when God runs on a ticket against flesh, why it must almost always it be that the flesh defeats God in the choice. It's because we're so badly fallen. It's because we're so deeply, incurable dense. And it's because only now and again does God find one bold enough and faith-filled enough that he'll turn short-range benefits and take the long-range profits. Moses was one. He despised the court of Pharoah that he might claim the long range promises of God.

Go to the 11th in the Hebrews and you'll see it, a long list of them, short range benefits and took eternity and the long, long profits that God gives to men. Always remember God gives you choices and then says, now, this isn't so good, but this is good and profitable unto. For God's sake, my brethren, let's learn to take the thing that's good for us rather than the thing we like. Let's learn to suffer it out and batter it through.

People are suffering in this city of Chicago tragically and won't get one little bit of blessing out of it. Old Andrew Murray said, it's shocking to think how much suffering some of God's people can do to not profit by it. I hear and see and meet many people whom I talk every week almost. I have interviews in which people pour their sorrows and griefs out to me. And they without seeking it get sorrows and tribulations and hardships that Christians don't have and won't take and if God offered it to them, they wouldn't accept it. They'd escape it and plow around it to get away from it. It's too bad.

Who has done this? I think an enemy has done this and I think I know his name. I think I know his name. He has done this. The devil has done this, that evil one who hates us. Always remember, if it's the world of the flesh and the devil and they make a proposition, always remember, it's for your pleasure for a short run. And God sets over against that something that isn't so pleasant. But, it's for your good and your profit while while the ages roll.

Young people, learn to choose the hard way if it's God's way, for its good and profitable unto you. You can start in the beginning, God made the heaven and the earth and end up with, even so come quickly, Lord Jesus, amen. And all the way through, this is good for you and profitable unto you. I recommend you go into this and let it slice you and chew you and grind you and soften you and prepare you for eternity. Because you're going there one of these days. You're going there either having lived a life of artful dodging of the cross, artful escaping of tribulation, the easy, fleshly way, or you're going there, like the Christian on his road to the Celestial City wearing his armor and carrying his sword and with his roll under his arm, ready to face any dragons or lions or devils that are in the way. Always remember whatever the devil says, and when God speaks it's good for you. And when God speaks, it's good, good and profitable for you.

So, if you don't like to do it, do it anyway and thank Him. Don't grumble. Don't complain. Don't pull a poor mouth and go through life gloomy. Thank Him for everything and say Father, this isn't particularly enjoyable, but I'll enjoy it anyway, knowing that you sent it and it's good and it's profitable for me. Amen.