

"Good Works and Our Purpose"

by Tom Wacaster

Paul told Titus, "And let our people also learn to maintain good works for necessary purposes, that they be not unfruitful" (Titus 3:14), "in all things showing thyself an ensample of good works" (2:6). Christ, our example, "went about doing good....and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38). While good works are both "necessary" and beneficial it is important that our good works be kept in proper perspective. Luke informed us that Jesus "came to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Our Lord never lost sight of that purpose. His miracles of compassion in which He provided bread to the multitudes, restored sight to the blind, and gave physical health to the infirm, were never isolated from the purpose for which He came. His was a ministry of reconciliation; not social reformation. He did not come to clean up the slums, but to cleanse our soul from sin.

This is not to say that social benefits will not derive from a wide scale application of godly principles to the whole of any civilization. Where the gospel has gone, been embraced and applied by the majority of any people, the standard of living has generally improved. In view of the fact that the church is the body of Christ, it is only reasonable that our purpose is closely identified with His purpose. In fact Paul informs us that God has given unto us "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18). The charge to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15) is a commission, not simply permission. Here is the purpose, the end, the reason if you will, for our very existence as the church of Jesus Christ. Lose sight of this truth, and we start down the road that leads to eventual self destruction.

Let history teach us a lesson here. The 18th and 19th century witnessed a dramatic impact on the western world with the advent of the "great awakening." Spiritual revival swept our own nation as a wild fire from the east coast to the west. But with the beginning of the 20th century, the liberal Protestant churches began to turn away from the proclamation of the gospel (however limited their concept may have been of that gospel), and turned their attention instead to finding a solution to the social ills of society. Instead of preaching the spiritual truths of the Bible they turned their attention to meeting the material needs of physical man. Thus the birth of the "social emphasis" in religious circles. With this new ideology the human race would enter a new era, and this earth (so they claimed) would become a utopia. A century has demonstrated the utter failure of such emphasis. Those denominations who accepted this new emphasis upon the physical to the neglect of the spiritual, had the very life choked out of them. They ceased to be evangelistic. Any awareness of lost souls about them gradually disappeared, missionaries were brought home, and the physical took precedence over the spiritual. As a result, worship became ritualistic and attendance declined in many of the main line denominations.

All the while these "churches" were doing great works. Some of those main line denominations have learned the lesson, and are retracing their steps. Unfortunately, some of our brethren have yet to learn the lessons of history and holy writ. It disturbs me when we hear of brethren having some sort of a public program to wash windows, or mow lawns of their neighbors. The cry goes forth that there should be some sort of a joint effort among the area congregations to have a "house painting" campaign, and reach out to our needy neighbors and scrape and paint their old worn out, neglected houses. Rather than glory in the cross, we glory in our good works. One congregation

bragged about their sponsorship of a young man on a campaign to some foreign country. When the young man returned did he tell of souls baptized into Christ? Was another congregation started in some remote part of the world? Nothing was said with regard to the spiritual success of that "missionary journey." Instead we hear how this young man taught a bunch of would-be sport stars how to play basketball. We hear of bread lines, soup kitchens, and "impact" churches marching forward with those things necessary to improve the physical and temporal lot of man while here on the earth. Now, before you brand me as radical, hard-hearted, cruel and unloving, please hear me out.

Good works are "necessary," as Paul commanded Titus. But beloved, we could wash every window in town, mow all the yards of every shut in, and provide taxi service for the elderly and impoverished, feed the needy, and yet eventually see every single one of them lost in eternity, unless the gospel is preached to their starving soul. When I was growing up, congregations emphasized Bible study, personal work, cottage classes, and gospel meetings. When we would visit a sister congregation, we would find tracts in the foyer, and hear of souls baptized. The emphasis was most definitely on the spiritual man. And when some good work was done, it was usually done in secret, as a gesture of love and kindness from one who has learned to love his fellow man. Our generation has seen a gradual abandonment of gospel meetings for specialized "workshops" that deal with marriage relationships, child rearing, and/or other personal needs. All of these are good, and admittedly they are needed, but they must not become the focus of our work, as if they accomplish the purpose for which we have been called into the body of Christ. The appeal to the physical by "entertainment oriented" programs has gained popularity. We are not here to entertain, we are here to bring men to their knees, to prick the hearts of men, and bring about a reform of the inner man so that men will bow at the feet of Jesus and cry out, "What must we do to be saved?" This is our sole purpose while sojourning in this wilderness. Those who have cast their lot toward "Sodom" where the physical is emphasized will, like Lot, find themselves living with the wicked and reaping the consequences. May we never fail to hold forth the word of light to a lost and dying world. This is the ONLY POWER that will successfully draw men to the cross of Christ.