

Titus 2:11-14

Sermon follow-up

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Titus 2:11-14 is a classic summation of the gospel and Christian living. I think the sermon covered most of the passage fairly well, but I want to say a little more about good works (v. 14). We know good works do not save us, yet they are a crucial part of the package of salvation. God works our good works in us; if God is saving us, that will include our ethical transformation. Further, we know that our response to the gospel must include not only faith but also repentance and obedience.

It should encourage us to know that God approves, delights in, and rewards our good works, however imperfect they might be. Good works, done in faith and love, pave the way to eternal glory. Good works are to eternal glory what a road is to a destination, or what sowing is to reaping, or what running a race is to crossing the finishing line and receiving the prize. That is to say, good works are a means to an end. Good works prepare us for and fit us for resurrection glory. This is the teaching of Scripture and the Reformed tradition.

Every choice we make is a choice for or against God. And every choice, in principle, moves us further down the path towards one or the other destination, either eternal glory or eternal wrath. C. S. Lewis puts it this way (*Mere Christianity*, p. 87):

People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, 'If you keep a lot of rules, I'll reward you, and if you don't, I'll do the other thing.' I do not think that is the best way of looking at it.

I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning a central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long, you are slowly turning the central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself.

To be the one kind of creature is heaven, that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to one state or the other.

This does not mean a true believer never falls. In another place (p. 52), Lewis writes, "A Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself back up and begin again after each stumble."

A final theological note on the text: It is common in some evangelical and Reformed to sharply distinguish justification from sanctification, and Christ's work for me from the Spirit's work in me. Certainly there are distinctions to be made here!! But Titus 2:11-14 is what you could call a "synthetic text." That is to say, it brings these together into the closest possible connection. It is not concerned with breaking our salvation apart into its constituent parts, so we can define and analyze each one in a rather independent fashion. Rather, these verses show the forensic and transformative elements of salvation are completely co-joined and intertwined at every moment. If anything, what theologians call sanctification is more ultimate than justification, even though justification is foundational: the final aim of Christ's death on the cross is not just a new status for God's people, but practical, embodied righteousness, demonstrated in a zeal for good works. The cross not only forgives sin, it defeats sin, overcomes sin, crushes sin, and purges sin. The various aspects of our salvation must be kept together because all flow to us from a single, common source.