

Title: JUDGMENT BASED ON GOOD WORKS, MATTHEW 25:14-30
(Chatham, NJ; 11/16/14, AM) [Pc – Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis]

Theme: God's demand that we obey and do good works does not contradict the teaching that salvation is by grace and not by anything we could have done to earn it.

Purpose: To encourage us to live within the paradox of the responsibility to do good things while realizing our salvation is still by grace.

Introduction:

1. Christianity rests on many paradoxes, apparent contradictions.
2. We die in order to live; we give up our lives to gain them; we rejoice when we experience persecution, etc.
3. The responsibility to obey and do good works seems to countermand the teaching that we are saved by the grace of God and not by good works.
4. Today, by looking at the Parable of the Talents, we consider how both of these ideas are taught in the Christian belief system.
5. In this parable Jesus seems to be walking a very close line to the idea that we are rewarded for what we do.
6. How can we not agree with him?
7. However, let's look at what seem to be opposing ideas and see if we can't make enough sense of them to live out our faith successfully.

I. Thesis: Rewarded for Good Works, The Parable of the Talents

- A. The story and its lessons, Matthew 25:14-30
 1. Talents – what God gives to each individual
 2. Servants – us
 3. Master – God
 4. The master's return – judgment
 5. Each receives according to what he accomplished based on what he was given
 6. By our theology of salvation by grace, perhaps we recoil at this
 7. Jesus then adds what seems even more unfair: those who have will be given more, 28-29 (Some express dismay at this, Luke 19:25)
- B. Judgment based on merit, Romans 2:6-11
 1. Eternal life given to those who demonstrate patience in well-doing, 7
 2. Wrath and fury await those who "obey unrighteousness," 8
 3. Paul then repeats himself
 4. Tribulation and distress for those who do evil, 9
 5. Glory and honor for those who do good, 10
 6. Based on impartiality, 11
 7. What can be more impartial than what we have done?
- C. The servant who did nothing was "wicked, lazy, and worthless," Mt. 25:26 & 30, and was excluded from the Kingdom.

II. Antithesis: Salvation Is by Grace, Not by Works

- A. Based on the mercy of God, Ephesians 2:1-10
 1. Dead in sin
 2. God, rich in mercy, 4
 3. Saved by grace, 6; through faith, 8
 4. Not by works, to prevent boasting, 9
- B. The goodness and kindness of God, Titus 3:4-7

1. Saved not by “works done by us in righteousness,” 5
2. But by his mercy, 5
3. Justified by his grace, 7

C. Deeds cannot merit salvation

1. Galatians 2:16 – not justified by works of the law
2. Jew and Gentile alike receive the same treatment
3. The righteous shall live by faith, Gal. 3:11
4. And so we seem at an impasse

III. Synthesis: The Same Bible Affirms Both Truths

A. The problem of two apparent opposites

1. Not that they seem to contradict one another
2. Our problem is that we would rather choose one over the other
3. Woodrow Wilson, in his essay “Leaders of Men”: “Only a very gross substance of concrete conception can make any impression on the minds of the masses; they must get their ideas very absolutely put, and are much readier to receive a half-truth which they can promptly understand than a whole truth which has too many sides to be seen all at once.”
4. Leads to jargon, sloganeering, and sound bites.
5. Contrary to this, George Washington, when faced with suppressing opposing points-of-view, wouldn’t do so because wanted an informed electorate.
6. G. K. Chesterton recognized heretics as “simplifiers who wanted to resolve the paradoxes and tensions of Christianity by discarding or distorting a key element in the Christian synthesis.” (Podles, *Touchstone*, Nov/Dec 2012, 41)

B. Our Best Answer Comes from Verses That Affirm Grace but also Affirm Works

1. Ephesians 2:10 comes hot on the heels of “saved by grace”
2. Titus 2:11-14 affirms redeeming grace as well as a people “zealous for good works,” 14
3. The entire Book of Titus affirms the importance of good works

Conclusions:

1. Do works of righteousness save us? No. (No matter how popular such things become in culture and business they will not be enough to get us into heaven.)
2. Will we be saved without them? No.
3. Live with the tension.
4. Salvation leads to a life of service and good works.
5. Do them in gratitude to a loving savior, but by all means do them.
6. Your talents as well as your salvation are to be used for the glory of God.