

# Motives for Good Works

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<i>Text</i>	1 Peter 2:9-12
<i>Confession</i>	<a href="#">Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32 Question 86</a>
<i>Readings</i>	Isaiah 28:16-29, Psalm 118
<i>Theme</i>	Peter explains who we are as a church and why we ought to live good lives.
<i>Purpose</i>	To remind you of who we are in Christ and to urge you to live good lives.

When you, as a parent, ask one of your children to do something around the house, they may well respond by asking, "Why?!" Sometimes the answer to that question will be, "Because I told you to!" But at other times you may want to give them some reasons as to why they need to do this task or job.

God tells us to do good works. He wants us to obey his commands and follow his laws. It is sufficient that he tells us to do so; this is what he has commanded and so this is what we must do. But to help prompt and motivate us to obey him God has also given us a number of reasons as to why we should do good works.

The Heidelberg Catechism lists four of these. Today we want to look at the second and fourth reasons mentioned in Q 86. They are described in this passage in 1 Peter 2:9-12. We are to do good works for God's praise and for the conversion of others.

## 1. We are to do good works **so that he may be praised through us.**

This is another motive that is directed to God; we do good works to show that we are *thankful* to him and that *he may be praised*.

a. Peter comes at this in verse 9 by describing **who we are** as the people of God. He uses the language of the Old Testament. This shows our continuity with the people of Israel.

In verse 8 he described those who rejected the Lord Jesus and refused to believe in him. In verse 9 he contrasts those people with the church.

### i. "But you are *a chosen people*."

All who believe in Jesus were chosen by God, even before the world was made, not because we were worthy of being chosen but rather because this was God's sovereign choice, his will.

He chose us to be his people, sons and daughters in his family. Through Christ we are included in the family of God. We are connected together as a close-knit community. The Lord's Supper that we celebrate together regularly is a symbol of this fellowship we share.

ii. And we are *a royal priesthood*.

The word *royal* reminds us that we belong to the kingdom of Christ and that we reign with him over all creation and will do so for all eternity.

We are *royal priests*. The priests of the old covenant offered sacrifices and incense and prayers on behalf of the people of God. But now *all* Christians are priests. We don't need any human mediators. We can go directly to God through our great High Priest Jesus Christ. Look at verse 5 of this chapter; we are "a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

iii. And we are *a holy nation*. That means we have been set apart by God to live pure and godly lives.

iv. We are *a people belonging to God*. This reminds us of that central promise of the covenant; "I will be your God and you will be my people." God has drawn us into a relationship with himself.

b. In verses 9 and 10 Peter reinforces this with a **series of contrasts**. You were in darkness and now you are in God's wonderful light; "once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Sometimes we forget who we are and what God has done for us. We are people of the light! Live in the light; don't let darkness come over your mind or heart. God wants you to live in the light of his presence.

c. God has shown us mercy and made us his people so that "that you may **declare the praises of him.**" (v 9b) This ought to be the natural response of God's people.

In Isaiah God described "my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may declare my praise." (43:21)

Many of the psalms call us to praise and glorify God. We often use these for our call to worship at the beginning of the service.

"Sing to the Lord you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment but his favour a lifetime." (Psalm 30:5)

"It is good to praise the Lord and to make music to your name O Most High." (Psalm 92:1)

This is our highest calling on earth and it will be the same in heaven. This is what we are to do now and will be doing in all eternity.

The Shorter Catechism captures this great calling when it asks; “What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

Is that your chief end? Are you glad to come to worship to praise God? Are you praising God in your prayers, or do your prayers look more like long shopping lists with all sorts of requests? Are you doing good so that, through you, others might also praise him? This is a powerful motive for doing good, “that he may be praised through us”.

2. Another motive for doing good is that by our godly living **our neighbours may be won over to Christ**. This is Peter’s point in verses 11-12.

a. Verse 11 addresses all of us as God’s people and is expressed in the negative.

i. Peter described those believers as “**aliens and strangers in the world.**” This is how Hebrews 11 spoke about Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham. They were aliens and strangers on earth; strangers in a foreign country; they were passing through, temporary residents. They knew they were citizens of heaven who were on their way home, like Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

This is also true of us in this New Testament age. As citizens of heaven we are different from the people of the world; we are holy, set apart.

You could compare it to people in our society who belong to a distinct racial group and who hold on to their culture and language. They mix with other people but they are still different.

Christians are like this. We are different, set apart.

ii. Because you are strangers, you must “**abstain from sinful desires.**” (v 11b) These are the desires of the flesh, or the desires of our sinful nature. Peter has in mind such desires as greed, lust, gluttony, drunkenness, envy, jealousy, covetousness.

We must *abstain* from these. That is, keep away from them, avoid them. If you were on your bike and you saw a big truck bearing down on you then you would quickly get out of the way! That’s how it must be with sinful desires; get out of the way! Don’t get run down!

The verb is in the present tense; *continually* abstain from sinful desires; avoid them *all the time*.

Sometimes we excuse our sins by thinking that we cannot control them. But with the help of the Holy Spirit our desires can and must be restrained.

iii. Peter strongly urges you to do this because these desires “**war against your soul.**”

The Christian life is a battle, a warfare, a fight. We are constantly doing battle against our sinful nature, as Paul describes so clearly in Romans 7. These desires of the flesh can do much damage to the well-being of our soul; they can harm us spiritually and so we must avoid them with all our might.

b. Verse 11 was negative and personal; verse 12 is positive and public.

i. Peter urges us to **“live good lives among the pagans.”**

We are aliens and strangers in this world, but we still live in the world. We are part of this community and this society. We live, work and study with non-Christian people.

As you do so, be sure you live a good life. The word “good” here means beautiful, winsome, lovely.

Is your life attractive to unbelievers? Does your conduct draw people to you and to the Lord Jesus? Are you living with integrity?

Do you have a good reputation with those around you? Are you consistent in your behaviour? Is all this evident in your marriage, in your family life, at school, at university, at work? Can people see you are a Christian in your words and works, in your speech and deeds? Peter develops all these in the rest of this letter.

Your example as a Christian is very powerful. Think of your conduct as an advertisement, like a bill-board on the motorway: you are advertising the Lord Jesus Christ to people. As people look at you will they want to know more, or would they be put off?

ii. Even if you live a good life some will **“accuse you of doing wrong.”**

That happened in the first century. One Roman author, Suetonius, approved of Nero’s persecution of Christians because they were “a class of people animated by a novel and mischievous superstition.”

The pagans, when they heard the words of the Lords’ Supper, accused Christians of being cannibals.

The silversmiths in Ephesus accused Paul of harming their business.

The Romans accused Christians of being disloyal to Caesar. Believers were often accused of doing wrong.

This will happen to you as well. Unbelievers may regard you as strange or weird. They may be suspicious of you and keep their distance. They may resent you as a do-gooder or think that you are putting yourself above them.

Your good life may prick their conscience and they may hate you for that. They may “accuse you of doing wrong.”

iii. But while some will do this, others “may see your good deeds and **glorify God** on the day he visits us.” (v 12b)

In the Bible a day of visitation from God could be a day of blessing or a day of judgement. If we live consistent Christian lives unbelievers cannot help but notice this and the Holy Spirit may use this to convert them. That would be a great blessing to them, a joyful visitation from the Lord!

Peter anticipates this in chapter 3:1-2 where he addresses Christian wives; “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.”

What is true of Christian wives must be true of all of us; all of us must live holy and godly lives as a witness to those around us.

The Church historian Eusebius, writing in the fourth century AD, described how the consistent witness of Christians over a couple of hundred years caused the accusations against them to vanish and the slander to disappear.

We ought to do good because this is the command of God. That ought to be enough.

But the Scriptures also motivate us with further incentives. “We do good so that God “may be praised through us...and so that by our godly living our neighbours may be won over to Christ”.

Do you live in such a way that your life and speech bring praise to God?

Are you praying that God may use your godly living so that your neighbours may come to know the Lord Jesus Christ?

Amen