

## FUNNEL FUSION: DISCIPLES' PRACTICE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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This appendix to **Future Church** is a concise study of what the New Testament teaches on how and why disciples of Jesus practice their faith.

It is not a study of the doctrine of salvation, although it touches on that doctrine at points. Read in isolation, this study could give the impression that salvation comes by works instead of by grace through faith. That is not the intent of this study or of the New Testament itself. Rather, this summary of New Testament teaching assumes the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, yet it explores **the essential, inescapable presence of practice in the life of every genuine, born-again believer.**

### PRACTICE AND REPENTANCE

A person is blessed for looking intently at “the Torah of liberty” (i.e., the instructions suitable for free people) and doing it; there is no blessing for hearing it but forgetting about it (Jas. 1:22–25). It is sin not to do good if you know the good to do (Jas. 4:17). But even if a person has lived a life of sin, that person gets into the kingdom of God if he or she regrets his or her disobedience and decides to do God’s will after all, which is vastly better than the person who says he or she wants to do God’s will but then ignores what God says (Matt. 21:28–32; 1 Pet. 3:10–12; Rev. 3:1–3). Repentance, then, entails bearing fruit, doing deeds appropriate to repentance (Matt. 3:8–10; Acts 28:20).

Doing what is right proves that a person has been fathered by God and does not belong to the devil (1 John 2:29; 3:4–10). Deeds of repentance include sharing one’s clothes and food with those who do not have it and refraining from using one’s authority and power to wrangle money out of people (Luke 3:10–14). Such actions prove that a person’s faith is genuine (Jas. 2:14–26). The presence of good works also distinguishes true prophets from false ones (Matt. 7:15–20).

### PRACTICE AND GOD’S POWER

The person who trusts in the Son and has fellowship with God does the truth, and it is evident that the person does his or her work with God (John 3:18–21; 1 John 1:6). Bearing fruit comes from hearing

the word and understanding it and from remaining in Jesus, the result being miraculous productivity that spreads the word even further (Matt. 13:23; John 15:5). God equips people to do the good things that please him (Heb. 13:21). For example, God began the Philippians' good work of sharing with Paul (Phil. 1:5–6). Paul also prayed that God would exert his power to fulfill the Thessalonians' desire to do faith-motivated good work (2 Thess. 1:11; 2:17).

### PRACTICE AND CONNECTION TO GOD

Doing and teaching the commands of Torah make a person great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19). Even Gentiles do Torah if Torah has been written on their hearts (Rom. 2:13–16). Doing the Father's will is characteristic of those who belong to the family of Jesus (Matt. 12:49–50), but doing Torah does not allow for passing judgment on brothers and sisters (Jas. 4:11–12). Doing what Jesus commands is consistent with being his friend (John 15:14). Bearing fruit in every good work pleases him (Col. 1:10), and if we do what pleases God—namely, believing in Christ and loving one another—then we can have confidence that we receive whatever we ask from him (1 John 3:22).

### GOOD WORKS

Good works are expected of disciples (Matt. 5:16; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:12; Rev. 2:26), because disciples were created, redeemed, and purified by Christ Jesus to do them (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14). Good works are acts of love that benefit people and meet pressing needs (Tit. 3:8, 14; Heb. 10:24). Loving brothers and sisters in Christ is something disciples do, not just something they say (1 Thess. 4:9–10; 1 John 3:18; Rev. 2:5, 19).

For example, a widow without family was to be supported by the church if she had a reputation for good works, which included raising children, showing hospitality to foreigners, washing the believers' feet, and assisting people in trouble (1 Tim. 5:10). Good works also include giving money to disciples who are poor (2 Cor. 9:8–9)—an especially important responsibility of the wealthy (1 Tim. 6:17–18)—and helping traveling brothers and sisters on their way (3 John 5–6). Jesus' disciples are even to do good to those who treat them badly, including wishing them well, praying for them, yielding possessions to them, and lending them money (Luke 6:27–38). Loving one's neighbor means showing mercy to a person in trouble even if the person belongs to a rival or hostile group (Luke 10:25–37). It also means not favoring the rich and influential over the poor and powerless (Jas. 2:8–9).

Good works are to be the adornment of truly religious women (1 Tim. 2:10). For example, Dorcas was a disciple who abounded with deeds of charity and kindness (Acts 9:36).

Good works also include teaching, correcting, and training people, for which knowledge of the Scriptures is essential (2 Tim. 3:16–17). However, for these to be good deeds, the wisdom must be shared gently (Jas. 3:13).

Testing self-proclaimed apostles and ejecting those who are not authentic is also a deed Christ loves (Rev. 2:2). Mature disciples are able to distinguish between what is good and what is bad because their “taste” has been trained by ingrained habits (Heb. 5:14).

### LEARNING TO PRACTICE

Disciples learn what to do by following the example of their teacher. Jesus set for his disciples the example of washing their feet so that they would do the same thing for one another (John 13:12–17). After Jesus’ disciples watched him cast out demons and heal people, he instructed them to do the same, and they reported back to him what they did (Mark 6:7–13, 30). Jesus promised that after he returned to the Father, his disciples would do even greater things than he did (John 14:10–12).

This pattern extends into the church, to which Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers to equip his holy people for works of service (Eph. 4:11–12). For example, Paul taught disciples in Philippi to do what they learned, received, heard, and saw him doing (Phil. 4:9). Paul likewise instructed Titus to be an example of good works to the people watching him (Tit. 2:7), although he stipulated to Timothy that a disciple is not ready to do good works unless the person has cleansed him- or herself from youthful cravings (2 Tim. 2:21–22).

### CONSEQUENCES OF PRACTICE

The promise of the kingdom of God is given to those who bear fruit and do his will (Matt. 21:43; Heb. 10:36; 2 Pet. 1:10–11; Rev. 14:13). By contrast, failing to do the will of the Father excludes a person from the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21–23). Doing what Jesus says is the difference between survival and destruction in the end (Matt. 7:24–27).

Specifically, the kingdom and eternal life will be inherited by those who fed the brothers and sisters of the King when they were hungry, gave them drink when they were thirsty, invited them in when they were foreigners, clothed them when they were exposed, and visited them when they were sick

or imprisoned, because the King counts these deeds as having been done to himself (Matt. 25:35–40; Heb. 6:10). Showing this love to God’s children shows love to God and does what he commands (1 John 5:1–3). Those who did not do these things, however, will go into eternal fire (Matt. 25:41–46).

In sum, the person who perseveres in doing good while seeking glory, honor, and immortality will rise from the dead to eternal life and peace, but the person who practices bad deeds with selfish ambition, not obeying the truth, will rise to judgment, righteous anger, tribulation, and distress (John 5:28–29; Rom. 2:6–10; 1 John 2:17).

Consequently, disciples are to abound in the work of the Lord steadfastly and immovably, because thanks to the resurrection, their labor is not for nothing (1 Cor. 15:58). They are to keep doing good without growing weary, because they will reap a harvest if they do not quit (Gal. 6:9).