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A THEOLOGY OF GOOD WORKS: THE APOSTLE PAUL'S CONCEPT OF GOOD
WORKS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

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Introduction

The apostle Paul lived and ministered within the historical context of Second Temple Judaism.¹ Following just over three decades of adherence to and immersion in Pharisaic Judaism, Saul of Tarsus converted to Jesus Christ and in consequence, conducted several missionary journeys proclaiming the gospel of Christ and writing letters to the newly established churches. While the Hebrew Scriptures provided the theological foundation for the apostle Paul's teaching, his concept of good works was forged within the historical context of Second Temple Judaism. Inasmuch as this is the case, it is essential to explore the concept of good works within the OT and Second Temple Literature in order to accurately assess the apostle Paul's theology of good works. This inquiry will assess Paul's theology of good works in comparison to the Old Testament (OT) Pseudepigrapha, OT Apocrypha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, and Philo in order to determine how Paul's concept compares to that of the relevant Second Temple literature.

Second Temple literature emphasizes the necessity of performing good works such as virtuous living and morality, alms-giving, prayer, and fasting; and exemplifies God's people as those who adhere to the Mosaic Law. In comparison, the Pauline letters demonstrate that the

¹ The time frame of the Second Temple period runs approximately from 516 B. C. to A. D. 100. See David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* (vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Isaiah Gafni, Aharon Oppenheimer, and Menahem Stern, eds., *Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1993); Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to First Century Judaism: Jewish Religion and History in the Second Temple Period* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period: Belief and Practice from the Exile to Yavneh* (London: Routledge, 2000); Larry R. Helyer, "The Necessity, Problems, and Promise of Second Temple Judaism for Discussions of New Testament Eschatology," *JETS* 47 (December 2004): 597–615; *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002); Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz, eds. *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (3 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1962); George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977); James C. VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

apostle Paul considers good works to be an essential aspect of Christian living. For Paul, good works are neither optional nor meritorious. According to the apostle Paul, justification by faith and practicing good works are inseparable realities for the Christian. The necessary outcome of justification by faith is a life that is characterized by good works and overall obedience to God's word.

While the Hebrew Scriptures are foundational theologically to the NT,² the literature produced within the Second Temple period provides the essential and more immediate historical and theological background to the NT.³ Were it not for the array of literature that pious Jews produced during the Second Temple period there would be a tremendous conceptual and historical void in New Testament studies. Therefore, the ensuing discussion will consider the apostle Paul's theology of good works in comparison to the concept of good works that is developed within the OT Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), Josephus, and Philo.

The Concept of Good Works in the OT Apocrypha

During the Second Temple period, pious Jews produced religious literature that built upon the teaching and theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Torah.⁴ One such body of religious literature is the Apocrypha. This body literature received the designation of Apocrypha in order to refer to the mystery or hiddenness of its content.⁵ Jesus, Paul, and the apostolic

² See Martin E. Sheldon, *The Apostle Paul's Theology of Good Works; With Special Emphasis on 1 Timothy 6:17–19* (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 46, where I noted, "The significance of the Hebrew Scriptures for diaspora Jews in general, and for Jesus Christ and his earliest followers in particular is inestimable. The books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings form the framework of Judaism's worldview."

³ Bruce Manning Metzger summarizes the importance of the intertestamental literature well in *The New Testament, Its Background, Growth, And Content* (New York: Abingdon, 1965), 39.

⁴ The literature generally described as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were produced from circa. 200 B. C. to A. D. 200. See VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 58.

⁵ D. A. deSilva, "Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," *DNTB*, 58.

fathers showed some familiarity with a number of the works within the Apocrypha.⁶ The Apocrypha, while not canonical, deserves acute attention because of the information it provides regarding the centuries leading up to and including the New Testament era.⁷ Several individual works within the Apocrypha contain significant references to the description and nature of good works and righteousness. These works emphasize the concepts of righteousness, repentance, virtuous living, and obedience to the Mosaic Law.

Tobit

Tobit, a moral tale from the Diaspora period, encourages “almsgiving and acts of charity within the Jewish community.”⁸ This apocryphal book commends moral living as demonstrated by its author, Tobit, a devout and pious Jew living in exile. For example, the tale commences with the author’s self-description as one who has lived his life in truth and uprightness, performing many charitable acts for his relatives who were in captivity (1:3, 16), including his practice of tithing and giving to the orphans, widows, and converts to Judaism (1:5–8; 2:2).⁹

Tobit emphasizes the salvific value of almsgiving (e. g., 1:3–8, 16; 12:7b–10).¹⁰ Raphael urges Tobit and Tobias to:

Do good and evil will not overtake you. Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies (Tob 12:7b–10).

⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁷ deSilva, 59.

⁸ deSilva, “Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” 61.

⁹ Sheldon, *Apostle Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 50.

¹⁰ Cf. Tobit 12:6–10 with Sir. 29:8; Matt 6:1–18.

Raphael's exhortation to Tobit and his son expresses well the sentiment of this moral tale in regard to the necessity of charitable giving as a means of purging sin.

In his instructions to Tobias (4:1–21), Tobit implores him to live a virtuous life by remembering the Lord, avoiding sin and transgression, and acting uprightly (v. 5). He assures his son that as long as he does right and gives alms to the poor (vv. 6, 16) he will prosper. Furthermore, charitable giving is a means of laying up treasure against the day of necessity (v. 9).¹¹ Charitable giving saves from death and delivers from darkness (vv. 10–11). Tobit lived his life “in prosperity, giving alms and continually blessing God and acknowledging God’s majesty” (14:2). At the end of his life, Tobit counseled Tobias and Sarah to “serve God faithfully and do what is pleasing in his sight” (14:8); to “do what is right and to give alms, and to be mindful of God and to bless his name at all times with sincerity and with all their strength” (14:9).

The Wisdom of Solomon

The deuterocanonical Wisdom of Solomon (WS) is a product of Egyptian Judaism from the late first century B.C.¹² The anonymous author exhorts his readers to “pursue Wisdom and thereby to live the righteous life that issues in immortality.”¹³ For instance, WS sets out with the injunction to “[l]ove righteousness, you rulers of the earth, think of the Lord in goodness and seek him with sincerity of heart” (1:1). In WS, Wisdom loves the good (7:22), and reflects God’s goodness (7:26). Furthermore, Wisdom teaches those who love righteousness to be self-controlled, prudent, just, and courageous (8:7).¹⁴

Righteousness is a prominent theme in WS. For example, WS details Wisdom’s influence

¹¹ Θέμα γὰρ ἀγαθὸν θησαυρίζεις σεαυτῷ εἰς ἡμέραν ἀνάγκης (Tob 4:9 LXX).

¹² deSilva, “Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” 61.

¹³ Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 205.

¹⁴ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 52.

upon the heroes of the ancient Hebrew faith from Adam to Moses (10:1–19:22). Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world (10:1). She “steered the righteous man” when the earth was flooded (10:4), and “recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God” (10:5). Wisdom “rescued a righteous man when the ungodly were perishing” (10:6), and delivered a righteous man from sin when he was sold into slavery (10:13). Indeed, the very source of righteousness is the strength of the Lord (12:16). Finally, knowledge of the true God is complete righteousness (15:3).¹⁵

WS includes the theme of judgment according to works. For instance, the author speaks of the wages of holiness and the prize for blameless souls (2:22). Furthermore, God tested the righteous and found them to be worthy of himself (3:1–5). They will experience salvation (5:2), and will live forever (5:15). On the other hand, the works of the ungodly are useless (3:11), and those who lived unrighteously will be tormented (12:23).¹⁶

Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach

Sirach, composed about 180 B.C., represents the pious Jews response to Hellenism.¹⁷ Sirach upholds a “commitment to Torah as the only path to honor and as the way of true wisdom.”¹⁸ The refrain “living according to the law” is repeated two times in the prologue demonstrating the author’s call to be committed to Torah. Furthermore, all who love the Lord are “filled with his law” (2:16).

Sirach contains familiar topics such as “prayer, forgiveness, almsgiving and the right use of wealth.”¹⁹ Charitable giving in a meritorious act for Sirach. For example, Sirach 3:30 states,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature*, 93–4.

¹⁸ deSilva, “Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” 61.

¹⁹ Ibid.

“As water extinguishes a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin” (cf. 17:22). God’s people must be willing to give to the poor (4:31).

In addition to charitable giving, repentance and forgiveness receives much attention throughout the book (e. g., 17:25–32; 18:21; 21:1–2). Honoring one’s father is a means of atoning for sin and showing respect for one’s mother is like laying up treasure (3:3–4).²⁰ God will dispense judgment on the basis on an individual’s conduct (11:26). “While God is merciful and compassionate (2:11), he will chastise and judge persons according to their deeds (16:12, 14).”²¹

Baruch

Baruch is written from a Diaspora perspective as an encouragement to Diaspora Jews to be assured that life still has meaning and to turn to God.²² According to the message of Baruch, God has established an eternal covenant with his people Israel (2:30–35) that is conditioned on the people remembering the sins of their fathers (2:31–33), repenting, and keeping God’s commandments (4:1).

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews

The prayer of Azariah and the song of the three Jews, an addition to the canonical Daniel, occurs between Dan 3:23 and 3:24 while they are being detained the furnace at the command of Nebuchadnezzar. Azariah’s prayer is one of confession, repentance, and acknowledgment of the glorious God of Israel.²³ For example, Azariah declares:

²⁰ ὁ τιμῶν πατέρα ἐξιλάσκειται ἁμαρτίας, καὶ ὡς ὁ ἀποθησαυρίζων ὁ δοξάζων μητέρα αὐτοῦ (Sir 3:3–4 LXX).

²¹ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 54.

²² Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature*, 174.

²³ *Ibid.*, 51.

Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors, and worthy of praise; and glorious is your name forever! For you are just in all you have done; all your works are true and your ways right, and all your judgments are true. You have executed true judgments in all you have brought upon us and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of our ancestors; by a true judgment you have brought all this upon us because of our sins. (Pr Azar 1–5)

This work encourages God’s people to be faithful to God, relying on God’s mercy and faithfulness to them during extremely adverse conditions.²⁴

1 and 2 Maccabees

First and 2 Maccabees detail the history of the Jewish people from the conquests of Alexander the Great until the death of Simon in 134 B.C.²⁵ First Maccabees in particular highlights deeds of courage and righteousness, especially in relation to Mattathias and his sons. For example, the author implores his readers, “Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name” (2:51). As one might expect, Abraham is a key personality in 1 Maccabees. The author inquires rhetorically, “Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?” (2:52).

The reference to Abraham in 2:52 is a key component of the theology of 1 Maccabees. Herein, Abraham’s faithfulness resulted in his being declared righteous. Compared to Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3; and Gal 3:6, an apparent contrast surfaces. Genesis 15:6 and the apostle Paul’s quotation of Gen 15:6 in Rom 4:3 and Gal 3:6 states that Abraham was considered righteous because he believed God (יְהוָה in Gen 15:6). The question is whether Abraham was declared righteous because of his faithfulness over a span of his life, or because he believed, at a certain point in time, God’s promises.

²⁴ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 56.

²⁵ Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature*, 149.

1 Esdras

First Esdras “has revised a Gentile story and reused it as a catalyst for a crucial event in Israelite history.”²⁶ For the purposes of this discussion, consideration is given to a passage in 1 Esdras 4:33–60 that contains Zerubbabel’s closing comments of his speech to king Darius and the nobles who were present. Zerubbabel extols the excellence of truth, concluding, “truth is great, and stronger than all things” (4:35). Noting the polyvalence of the term truth within 1 Esdras, Nickelsburg comments that term “has connotations not only of truth but also of rightness, steadfastness, and uprightness.”²⁷ For the author of 1 Esdras, truth is the exact opposite of unrighteousness (4:36–37), and “endures and is strong forever, and lives and prevails forever and ever” (4:38). Zerubbabel concludes: “Blessed be the God of truth!” (4:40).

The Concept of Good Works in the Pseudepigrapha

Multiple works make up the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (OTP). These works were produced during the period known as Second Temple Judaism.²⁸ The significance and nature of the OTP is summarized well by Charlesworth:

The Pseudepigrapha, therefore, are an important source for understanding the social dimensions of Early Judaism. The simplistic picture of Early Judaism should be recast; it certainly was neither a religion which had fallen into arduous legalism due to the crippling demands of the Law, nor was it characterized by four dominant sects. A new picture has been emerging²⁹

Devout Jews who produced the writings of the OTP express a deep belief in the Most High God, a reliance on his covenantal mercy, and a humble desire to live righteously in this world in order to experience the blessings of salvation in the coming age.³⁰

²⁶ Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 60.

²⁹ Charlesworth, *OTP*, xxix.

³⁰ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 60.

1 and 2 Enoch

1 Enoch³¹ is one of three pseudepigrapha attributed to the OT figure Enoch, the seventh descendant of Adam and Eve (cf. Gen 5:24).³² 1 Enoch anticipates an eschatological judgment in the distant future (1:2; 38:1–6), when God will march upon Mount Sinai with mighty power (1:4). God will execute judgment upon both the righteous and the wicked (1:5–9). The author declares, “Behold, he (God) will arrive with ten million of the holy ones in order to execute judgment upon all. He will destroy the wicked ones and censure all flesh on account of everything that they have done, that which the sinners and the wicked ones committed against him” (1:9; cf. 38:2–6; 48:8).³³ God’s mercy, however, is evident even as he executes judgment (50:1–5; cf. 61:13). 1 Enoch illustrates the belief that God is merciful to the wicked and will judge them with the intent of bringing them to repentance.³⁴

While the wicked will be judged because of their oppressive deeds (53:2; 54:6, 10), the works of the holy ones who are in heaven will be weighed in the balance (61:8). However, no indication is given that this weighing of their deeds is for the purpose of determining whether they have been “good enough” to enter heaven as they are already in heaven. Perhaps the purpose is to determine rewards, but the text is not clear at this point.³⁵

The book of *2 Enoch*³⁶ amplifies Gen 5:21–32 by covering “events from the life of Enoch to the onset of the flood.”³⁷ *2 Enoch* is concerned about righteousness and following God’s commandments. For instance, he acknowledges that the Lord created man in his image, and gave

³¹ E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in *OTP* (ed. Charlesworth), 1:5–89.

³² *Ibid.*, 5.

³³ This concept is apparently taken up in the NT where Jude (14–15) refers specifically to Enoch, citing the first sentence of 1:9.

³⁴ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 63.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ F. I. Andersen, “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in *OTP* (ed. Charlesworth), 1:91–221.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

him the ability to see, hear, think, and argue (65:2), so that he will be able to think of his sins and write both his good and evil achievements (65:3). The purpose is so that man will not transgress the Lord's commandments (65:5).³⁸

4 Ezra

Fourth Ezra addresses is indicative of at least a segment of Judaism during the first century A. D.³⁹ In a manner consistent with biblical theology, *4 Ezra* depicts the universal consequences of Adam's transgression (3:7, 21–22; 4:26–32; 7: 10–11; 118). Eschatological judgment is decisive, truthful (7:104), and imminent (8:59–62). The Most High will finally reveal his Son, the Messiah (7:28–29; 11:37–12:1; 12:31–34; 13:3–13; 13:25–52) who will judge the nations (13:12, 32–38) and lead the righteous remnant into a temporal messianic kingdom that will precede the end of the age (7:28–29; 12:32–34; 13:39–50). The inauguration of a temporal kingdom serves as a prelude to the Day of Judgment (7:26–35).⁴⁰

Ezra's soteriology also entails the concept of a treasury of works. For instance, the angelic guide assured Ezra that he has a "treasure of works laid up with the Most High; but it will not be shown to you until the last times" (7:77).⁴¹ Again, Ezra refers to the righteous who have many works laid up with the Most High, and as a result of their righteous deeds will receive their reward (8:33). Herein is a striking comparison to the NT, especially Jesus' imperative to store up treasure in heaven (Matt 6:20–21), and the apostle Paul's charge to Timothy to command the rich "to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up for themselves a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they

³⁸ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 64.

³⁹ B. M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in *OTP* (ed. Charlesworth), 1:518–59.

⁴⁰ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 66.

⁴¹ Latin text is from Robert L. Bensly, *The Fourth Book of Ezra: The Latin Version Edited From the Mss* (Texts and Studies 3; ed. J. Armitage Robinson; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1895), 32.

may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Tim 6:18–19).⁴² This comparison illustrates the existence of a common concept about good works within Judaism during the Second Temple period.⁴³

2 Baruch⁴⁴

Second Baruch provides another case in point. The “righteous justly have good hope for the end and go away from this habitation without fear because they possess with you a store of good works which is preserved in treasuries. Therefore, they leave this world without fear and are confident of the world which you have promised to them with an expectation full of joy” (14:12).⁴⁵ Furthermore, “the books will be opened in which are written the sins of all those who have sinned,” and “the treasuries in which are brought together the righteousness of all those who have proven themselves to be righteous” (24:1). Possibly alluding to the same treasury of good works, the author declares the good works of the righteous will be accomplished before the Most High (69:4).

3 Baruch⁴⁶

The concept of good works in *3 Baruch* employs a metaphor that is similar to the treasury of good works in *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*. The angelic guide takes Baruch to the fifth heaven to show him the glory of God (11:1–2). After Michael opened the gate, Baruch noticed a very large bowl in his hand and inquired about it. The angelic guide explained that “[t]his is where the virtues of the righteous and the good works which they do are carried, which are brought by him before the

⁴² For a more detailed discussion and exegetical analysis 1 Tim 6:17–19 see Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 135–161.

⁴³ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 67.

⁴⁴ A. F. J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *OTP* (ed. Charlesworth), 1:615–52.

⁴⁵ This treasury of good works is reminiscent of *4 Ezra* 7:77; 8:33, Jesus words in Matt 6:19–20, and Paul’s charge to Timothy in 1 Tim 6:17–19.

⁴⁶ H. E. Gaylord, “3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *OTP* (ed. Charlesworth), 1:653–60.

heavenly God” (11:9). Those who have laboriously done good works will be rewarded well (15:2).⁴⁷

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs⁴⁸

Righteousness, good deeds, and virtuous living are prevalent motifs in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (*T. Reub.* 4.1; *T. Levi* 13.5; *T. Dan.* 1.3; *T. Dan.* 5.5; *T. Naph.* 2.4; cf. Isa 64:8; Jer 18:1–10; Rom 9:19–21). The author of *T. Naph.* comments on the blessings of doing good when he states that “[if] you achieve the good . . . men and angels will bless you; and God will be glorified through you among the gentiles” (*T. Naph.* 8.4; cf. Matt 5:14–16).⁴⁹ The ultimate blessing for living in holiness and in accord with the Lord’s commands is to dwell with me in hope, and along with all Israel, to be gathered to the Lord (*T. Benj.* 10.11).⁵⁰

Psalms of Solomon⁵¹

In *Psalms of Solomon*, God is the judge who recompenses sinners for their action and shows mercy upon the righteous (2:34–35; 17:8–9). Persons have the ability freely make moral decisions (9:4). Those who choose to do what is right save up life for themselves with the Lord (9:5). Furthermore, the Lord is faithful “[t]o those who live in the righteousness of his commandments (14:2).

The Concept of Good Works in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Doubtless, one of the most significant finds for Christianity and Judaism in the twentieth century was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) that began in 1947. Over 800 manuscripts have

⁴⁷ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 70.

⁴⁸ H. C. Kee, “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” in *OTP* (ed. Charlesworth), 1:775–828.

⁴⁹ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ R. B. Wright, “Psalms of Solomon,” in *OTP* (ed. Charlesworth), 2:639–70.

emerged from the caves at Qumran.⁵² The DSS manuscripts date from 250 B.C. to A.D. 68.⁵³

Two primary documents, the *Rule of the Community* (1QS), and the *Damascus Document* (CD), provide crucial information regarding the beliefs and practices of the Qumran community.⁵⁴

Those wishing to join the community voluntarily seek membership and acknowledge the various precepts and expectations. Furthermore, one seeking entrance into the community did so “in order to seek God [with all (one’s) heart and with all (one’s) soul; in order] to do what is good and just in his presence, as commanded by means of the hand of Moses and his servants the Prophets” (1QS1:1–3a).⁵⁵ Members of the community are expected “to keep a distance from all evil” (1:4), and “to become attached to all good works; to bring about truth, justice and uprightness” (1:5). Entrants know that they are establishing a covenant before God (1:16–18a), must confess all their sins (1:24–26), and acknowledge God’s merciful blessings (2:1).

Repentance and doing the works of the Law are essential for entering and continuing in the life of the community. For example, “by the spirit of uprightness and of humility his sin is atoned. And by the compliance of his soul with all the laws of God his flesh is cleansed by being sprinkled with cleansing waters and being made holy with the waters of repentance” (3:8–9).

The Concept of Good Works in Josephus

The writings of Flavius Josephus “provide a vital political, topographical, economic, social, intellectual, and religious supplement to our biblical information.”⁵⁶ Josephus’ vast literary

⁵² Hershel Shanks, James C. VanderKam, P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., and James A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Forty Years* (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), 1–2.

⁵³ Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 83–4.

⁵⁴ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 73. See Markus Bockmuehl, “1QS and Salvation at Qumran” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (vol. 1; ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 386.

⁵⁵ All DSS quotations are taken from Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*.

⁵⁶ Paul L. Maier, *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (trans. William Whiston; comm. Paul L. Maier; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 7.

legacy includes *The Jewish War*, *Jewish Antiquities*, the *Life*, and *Against Apion*.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the writings of Josephus offer “interpretative historiography which, from time to time, yields insights into what Josephus, one particular late first-century Jew, thought on specific theological subjects.”⁵⁸

Josephus recognizes the divine origin of the Law of Moses (*Ant.* 3.5.4–8), and describes it as a gift from God (*Ant.* 3.78; 223; 4.213, 316, 318). He argues that the Law was inherently good, encouraging decent human behavior (*Ant.* 4.231–39, 275, 276), and rational (*Ant.* 3.180–87).⁵⁹

For Josephus, salvation/deliverance is conditioned upon confession and repentance. For example, he assures his countrymen that “there is a place left for your preservation, if you be willing to accept it; and God is easily reconciled to those that confess their faults, and repent of them” (*J.W.* 5.415). Furthermore, God’s aid and alliance is inextricably connected to obedience of the Law (2.390–394).⁶⁰

For Josephus, the Mosaic Law was central to Israel’s relationship to God. Individual obedience to the Law was essential to maintaining one’s relationship to God. Having been entrusted with the Law placed Israel in a privileged position, giving them access to God’s favor and blessings which were commensurate to their adherence to the Law.⁶¹ Spilsbury summarizes the overall tenor of Josephus when he comments that “remaining in God’s favor is not simply a matter of ethnic descent, as if physical descent from Abraham or Moses ensured God’s patronage. Rather, each generation is required to live with a gratitude to God expressed through

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁸ Paul Spilsbury, “Josephus” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (vol. 1; ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 242.

⁵⁹ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 80.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

scrupulous obedience to the Law.”⁶² For Josephus, being in relationship with God and enjoying God’s blessings was conditioned upon one’s practice of God’s law.⁶³

The Concept of Good Works in Philo of Alexandria

Philo of Alexandria “lived his entire life in Alexandria, Egypt, came from a prominent and wealthy family, was well educated, and was a leader within the Alexandrian Jewish community.”⁶⁴ According to Scholer, “Philo’s concern to interpret Moses shows constantly both his deep devotion and commitment to his Jewish heritage, beliefs, and community, and also reflects his unabashed use of philosophical categories and traditions.”⁶⁵ May points out that most of his works were actually commentaries on biblical themes, especially within the Pentateuch.⁶⁶

For Philo, Jews have a unique relation to God (*Abr.* 98; *Mos.* 1.149; *Spec. Leg.* 1.97; 2.162–67).⁶⁷ However, physical descent from Abraham is not spiritually significant, nor sufficient to ensure a place in heaven (e.g. *Praem.* 152).⁶⁸ Furthermore, although some who are Jews physically have become apostate (*Spec. Leg.* 1.54–57, 315–18), they may be forgiven if they repent.⁶⁹ Philo “generally speaks of persons authentically related to God as being committed to the Mosaic law inasmuch as it constitutes the most accurate reflection of natural law.”⁷⁰

⁶² Spilsbury, “Josephus,” 259.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ D. M. Scholer, “An Introduction to Philo Judaeus of Alexandria” (*The works of Philo: Complete and unabridged.* n.p. Logos Bible Software. 4.0c., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ David M. May, “Philo of Alexandria” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (vol. 1; ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 363.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 371.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 372.

Summary and Conclusion

The concept of good works is prevalent in the literature of Second Temple Judaism. For example, several books in the Apocrypha extol virtuous living and morality; encourage almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; and exemplify God's people as those who adhere to the Mosaic law. Several books within the Pseudepigrapha depict the certainty of eschatological judgment during which the wicked will be destroyed, and the righteous will be delivered. Fourth Ezra in particular, refers to the righteous who have many works laid up with the Most High, and as a result of their righteous deeds will receive their reward (cf. 8:33). The literature of the DSS depicts the necessity of adhering to the Mosaic Law. Josephus and Philo both acknowledge the centrality of and necessity of keeping the Mosaic Law without neglecting the need for repentance and faith.

The true people of God consist of those who enter a covenantal relationship with the Lord and live in obedience to the Lord's commands. It was never the case that God's people had to mindlessly keep the commandments in order to maintain a right relationship with God. According to the OT Scriptures, God's people have always been justified by faith (Gen 15:6; cf. Hab 2:4) and follow through in habitual devotion and obedience to God. While much of the literature of Second Temple Judaism has a correct emphasis on good works, obedience, repentance, and faith; the object of one's faith is misplaced especially in Josephus and Philo. The apostle Paul corrects this misplacement in his writings by clearly focusing on Jesus Christ as the only appropriate object of faith (e. g., Rom 3:21–4:25).

The Concept of Good Works within the Pauline Corpus

The ensuing study demonstrates that the concept of good works are an integral aspect of the apostle Paul's theology. Furthermore, the practice of good works are essential to being a Christian in this world (Eph 2:8–10) and has certain implications for the Christian in the coming age (1 Tim 6:17–19).

Romans 2:5–11

5 κατὰ δὲ τὴν σκληρότητά σου καὶ ἀμετανόητον καρδίαν θησαυρίζεις σεαυτῷ ὀργὴν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὀργῆς καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως δικαιοκρισίας τοῦ θεοῦ 6 ὃς ἀποδώσει ἕκαστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ· 7 τοῖς μὲν καθ' ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν ζητοῦσιν ζωὴν αἰώνιον, 8 τοῖς δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας καὶ ἀπειθοῦσιν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πειθόμενοις δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ ὀργὴ καὶ θυμός. 9 θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν, Ἰουδαίου τε πρώτον καὶ Ἕλληνος· 10 δόξα δὲ καὶ τιμὴ καὶ εἰρήνη παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τὸ ἀγαθόν, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρώτον καὶ Ἕλληνι· 11 οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν προσωπολημψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ.⁷¹

Paul anticipates an eschatological day of judgment during which time God's righteous judgment will be dispensed (2:5) and God will recompense (ἀποδώσει) each person according to his works (2:6). The reward for those who persevere (ὑπομονήν) in doing a good work (ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ), or doing good (NIV 2011) is eternal life (2:7). The statement is mirrored in 2:10, but here those who accomplish good (παντί τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τὸ ἀγαθόν) will be rewarded with glory, honor and peace. Good works are ethical and characterize one's overall lifestyle.⁷² The necessity of performing good works is accentuated by Paul's warning that each person will be judged according to his works (2:6).⁷³

⁷¹ Unless otherwise note, citations of passages in the GNT are from K. Aland, B. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, & B. M. Metzger, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

⁷² Barry D. Smith, *What Must I Do To Be Saved? Paul Parts Company With His Jewish Heritage* (NTM 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 185. Commenting on Rom 2:5–11, Smith correctly notes the “best interpretive option is that Paul is referring to believers, whom he expects to be characterized by good works.”

⁷³ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 91.

Both the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple literature are replete with the concept that an eschatological judgment will take place during which everyone will be judged on the basis of their works. For instance, the phrase ὅς ἀποδώσει ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ occurs in Ps 61:13; Prov 24:12; Job 34:11 (LXX).⁷⁴ Lamentations expresses the biblical concept of divine retribution in similar fashion through a plea for God's curse upon his enemies: Ἀποδώσεις αὐτοῖς ἀνταπόδομα, κύριε, κατὰ τὰ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν (Pay them back what they deserve, Lord, for what their hands have done; Lam 3:64).

The concept of judgment according to works is expressed in the OT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha as well. For example, the author of *Pss. Sol.* 9:5 declares, ὁ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην θησαυρίζει ζωὴν αὐτῷ παρὰ κυρίῳ, καὶ ὁ ποιῶν ἀδικίαν αὐτὸς αἴτιος τῆς ψυχῆς ἐν ἀπωλείᾳ τὰ γὰρ κρίματα κυρίου ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κατ' ἄνδρα καὶ οἶκον.⁷⁵ *Pss. Sol.* also recalls in regard to Israel's enemies, κατὰ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα αὐτῶν ἀποδώσεις αὐτοῖς, ὁ θεός εὐρεθῆναι αὐτοῖς κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν (*Pss. Sol.* 17:8).

In the eschatological vein of Judaism, the apostle Paul refers to an eschatological judgment, enumerating the rewards given to those who faithfully practice good works in this life and the dire consequences of practicing evil. Again, those who persevere in doing good (καθ' ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ)⁷⁶ will be rewarded with eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον; 2:7).

⁷⁴ All quotations from the LXX are from Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft), 1979.

⁷⁵ Psalms of Solomon 9:5 translates, "The one who does righteousness stores up life for himself with the Lord, but the one who does unrighteousness causes his life to be destroyed, for the righteous judgments of the Lord are according to the individual and the household."

⁷⁶ "ὑπομονήν," BDAG, 1040.

Romans 13:1–7

Ethical works are clearly in view as Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that they do not need to fear those who are in authority over them as long as they are good (Rom 13:1–7). Paul states, οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ. θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν· τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποίει, καὶ ἕξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς. Good works are generally appropriate and acceptable even in a pagan culture like the first century Roman culture. Paul makes the point that good works certainly stand in stark contrast to the evils within a given society and are generally viewed with favor.⁷⁷

Romans 13:11–14

In view of the imminent eschaton (13:11), Paul implores the Roman Christians, ἀποθώμεθα οὖν τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκότους, ἐνδυσώμεθα [δὲ] τὰ ὄπλα τοῦ φωτός.⁷⁸ (“put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light”; 13:12 NIV 2011). It is high time for believers to take off works darkness and to put on the weapons or armor of light (cf. Eph 6:10–18). Christians must ready themselves for the spiritual battle that is surely to intensify as the day of salvation approaches. Being girded with the armor of light stands in stark contrast to the deeds of darkness. Having on the armor of light means to “behave decently, as in the daytime (13:13a) and to avoid orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension, and jealousy (13:13b). To be very clear, Paul simply implores them to “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (13:14).⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 103. See also Moo, *Romans*, 800–2.

⁷⁸ Aland, K., Aland, B., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C. M., & Metzger, B. M. (2012). *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th Edition., Ro 13:12). Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

⁷⁹ See Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 472–3.

2 Corinthians 9:6–10

The Corinthians had expressed a desire to contribute to the collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem about a year prior to Paul's writing his second letter to the Corinthian church (8:10). Paul writes in order to prompt them to make good on their commitment to give to the poor in Jerusalem, recalling the Macedonians' example (8:1) and imploring them to excel in the grace of giving (8:7).⁸⁰ He reminds them about the proverb, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (9:6).⁸¹ Furthermore, Paul encourages them to give cheerfully (9:7), assuring them God is able to make all grace abound to them so that at all times and in all things they would abound in every good work (9:8) and will increase the harvest of their righteousness (9:9–10).⁸² By combining Isa 55:10 and Hos 10:12, the apostle accentuates the principle that God rewards generosity.⁸³

Paul's conclusion is clear as he correlates the principle of sowing generously (9:6) with the assurance they would abound in every good work (9:8). God blesses and resources an attitude and lifestyle of generosity.⁸⁴ Garland summarizes the principle contained within this text well:

Paul assumes in this verse that the most valuable thing about money is that we can use it for every good work. He avoids the plural "works," which he tends to connect with "works of law" and the ritual acts of piety, such as circumcision, and observing food laws. "Every good work" here refers to acts of charity (see 1 Cor 15:58) and is little different from what James says about supplying the needs of the brother or sister who is naked and lacks daily food (Jas 2:14–17). Abounding in every good work comes from abounding in God's grace. Every good work does not earn grace; grace, already received, generates the good work.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 104.

⁸¹ This is a common concept in Jewish literature. cf. Prov 11:24–25; Mal 3:10; Sir 35:10–11.

⁸² Sheldon, 104.

⁸³ See Richard L. Pratt, Jr., *I & II Corinthians* (HNTC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 406.

⁸⁴ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 639.

⁸⁵ D. E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 409.

The significance for the present study is that in this instance abounding in good works is equivalent to an attitude of generosity and willingness to give to those in need.⁸⁶

Galatians 5:1–6

Paul's primary concern in his letter to the Galatians is the importance of realizing they had been made righteous by faith in Christ in contra distinction to law observance (2:16; 3:2, 5, 10). A concurrent concern is effect that having been made righteous by faith has on the believer's life (5–6). Having reminded the Galatians that Christ had freed them from the yoke of slavery (i.e. the Mosaic Law in 4:21–5:1), Paul's argument transitions at 5:1 as he moves from the indicative of the Christian's position in Christ (1–4) to the imperative of Christian behavior (5–6).

Galatians 5:1–6 is especially pertinent to Paul's concept of good works.

Τῆ ἐλευθερία ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν· στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε. **2** Ἴδε ἐγὼ Παῦλος λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν περιτέμνησθε, Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς οὐδὲν ὠφελήσει. **3** μαρτύρομαι δὲ πάλιν παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ ὅτι ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι. **4** κατηγορήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ, οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, τῆς χάριτος ἐξέπεσατε. **5** ἡμεῖς γὰρ πνεύματι ἐκ πίστεως ἐλπίδα δικαιοσύνης ἀπεκδεχόμεθα. **6** ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομὴ τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη.

Paul argues here that if the Galatians are circumcised in order to observe the Mosaic Law, then “Christ will be of no value” to them (5:2). Furthermore, in so doing they would be obligated to the entire law (5:3), consequently falling from grace (5:4). In stark contrast to justification by law observance, believers eagerly await the hope of righteousness by faith through the agency of the [Holy] Spirit (πνεύματι; 5:5).⁸⁷ Paul is alluding to eschatological judgment at which time the believers' hope will be fully realized.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ See Roger L. Omanson and John Ellington, *A Handbook on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 167–8.

⁸⁷ See Thomas Marberry, “Galatians” in *RHBC* (Robert E. Picirilli, gen. ed.; Nashville: Randall House, 1988), 87, who suggests that πνεύματι without the article may very well indicate “the manner (or sphere) in which the Christian awaits the true righteousness which comes from Christ.”

⁸⁸ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 109.

Paul drives home the point in Gal 5:6, ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη. The prepositional phrase ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ is brought to the front to add emphasis to the believer's union with Christ. The compound subjects, περιτομή and ἀκροβυστία follow with the main verb, ἰσχύει (meaning to be valid, effective, to count for something;⁸⁹ to have meaning.⁹⁰), is inserted between them. The conjunction ἀλλὰ is followed by the nominative πίστις (the subject of the clause) and the genitive ἀγάπης with δία. The present middle participle ἐνεργουμένη comes at the end of the sentence.⁹¹ The middle voice indicates that faith (the subject of the clause) is working itself out (expressing itself) through (the instrumentality of) love.⁹²

Commenting on the phrase δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη; Gal 5:6), Bruce notes that Paul depicts “faith as the root and love as the fruit.”⁹³ Arichea summarizes the case very well:

If that is the case, then what is important? Paul says it is *faith that works through love*. “Faith” here once again is trust in, submission to, and commitment of oneself to Christ. This kind of faith *works through love*. (Paul’s mention of *love* here seems to anticipate what he is going to say later in verses 13 ff.) The verb phrase should probably be understood as “expresses itself through love” (NAB). *Love* should probably be understood primarily as care and concern for people, and not as a reference to God’s love for man or man’s love for God.⁹⁴

In Gal 5:1–6, Paul clearly teaches that external observance of the law is not efficacious for salvation. However, it is faith that gives credence to and makes one's works significant and count for something. Indeed, the faith of the one who has been placed in union with Christ will express

⁸⁹ Zerwick, 574.

⁹⁰ “ἰσχύω,” BDAG, 484.

⁹¹ “ἐνεργέω,” BDAG, 335; See Bruce, *Galatians*, 232.

⁹² Sheldon, 109,

⁹³ Bruce, *Galatians*, 232.

⁹⁴ Arichea, and Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 124; See also Kenneth S. Wuest, “Galatians in the Greek New Testament” (WWSGNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1944), 142.

itself through acts of self-sacrificial love. The tree may indeed be an appropriate analogy because when faith is present, it will manifest itself through the works of the believer.⁹⁵

Galatians 5:16–26

16 Λέγω δέ, πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς οὐ μὴ τελέσητε. **17** ἢ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα κατὰ τῆς σαρκός, ταῦτα γὰρ ἀλλήλοις ἀντίκειται, ἵνα μὴ ἂ ἐὰν θέλητε ταῦτα ποιῆτε. **18** εἰ δὲ πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, οὐκ ἐστὲ ὑπὸ νόμον. **19** φανερὰ δὲ ἐστὶν τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, ἅτινά ἐστιν πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια, **20** εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία, ἔχθραι, ἔρις, ζῆλος, θυμοί, ἐριθεΐαι, διχοστασίαι, αἰρέσεις, **21** φθόνοι, μέθαι, κῶμοι καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις, ἃ προλέγω ὑμῖν, καθὼς προεῖπον ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες βασιλείαν θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν. **22** ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἀγάπη χαρὰ εἰρήνη, μακροθυμία χρηστότης ἀγαθωσύνη, πίστις **23** πραῦτης ἐγκράτεια· κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος. **24** οἱ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις. **25** εἰ ζῶμεν πνεύματι, πνεύματι καὶ στοιχῶμεν. **26** μὴ γινώμεθα κενόδοξοι, ἀλλήλους προκαλούμενοι, ἀλλήλοις φθονοῦντες.

Galatians 5:16–26 is also significant in relation to Paul’s concept of good works. Herein the apostle Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. Paul implores, πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε and you will not gratify (οὐ μὴ τελέσητε)⁹⁶ the desires of the flesh/body (ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκός). The Galatians had received the Spirit by believing the gospel (3:2). This reception was accompanied with great works/miracles (3:5). Now, he is imploring the Galatians to demonstrate the presence of the Spirit in their lives. In other words, Paul commands them “to let [their] conduct be directed by the Spirit.”⁹⁷

Following the injunction to “walk in the Spirit,” Paul details the “works of the flesh” (5:19–21) contrasting them with the “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22–23). The fruit of the Spirit delineated in the present text are the manifestations that demonstrate a vibrant faith and a life that

⁹⁵ Sheldon, 111.

⁹⁶ Bruce, *Galatians*, 243, points out that this construction indicates a “strong negative statement about the future.” The statement may be rendered: “If you walk by the Spirit, you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.”

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

is lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The one who is experiencing union with Christ by faith and follows the guidance of the Spirit will express the virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Ephesians 2:8–10

8 Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· **9** οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι. **10** αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

In relation to Paul’s theology of good works, focus turns immediately to Eph 2:8–10. Paul has enumerated the blessing that God has abundantly given to all who are in union with Christ (1:3–14), and reminded the Ephesians that the same divine power that had raised Jesus Christ from the dead is operative in them by raising them from spiritual death and making them alive with Christ (1:15–2:7).⁹⁸ Paul goes on to explain the essence of salvation in Christ (2:8–10). Paul declares, τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι (v. 8). This clause consists of the present form of εἰμί with the perfect passive participle σεσωσμένοι, indicating a present condition that is the result of a past completed and settled action.⁹⁹ The sense of the statement is that “you have been saved and are presently in a state of salvation”¹⁰⁰ with emphasis on the continuation of the past, settled action.¹⁰¹ The genitive construction (τῇ χάριτι) reveals God’s grace as the basis of this present

⁹⁸ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 114. See also Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 154.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 115. See H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1955), 232; Robert E. Picirilli, “Commentary on Ephesians,” in *The Randall House Bible Commentary: Galatians Through Colossians* (Nashville: Randall House, 1988), 157; Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 46–7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

condition of salvation. This declaration is paralleled in verse 9, where Paul describes this salvation as God's gift (θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον).¹⁰²

While salvation is entirely the work of God, it is appropriated through faith (διὰ πίστεως). Διὰ with the genitive πίστεως indicates the means by which this salvation is appropriated.¹⁰³ The next phrase elaborates on this statement, clarifying that salvation is not appropriated by any merit of the individual (καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν). Τοῦτο, referring back to the entire preceding clause, refers to the condition of being saved by grace through faith.¹⁰⁴ Clarifying the matter further, Paul adds that it is not by or through works (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων), thus prohibiting any cause for boasting on the individual's part (ὅνα μή τις καυχῆσθαι; cf. Rom 3:27; 4:1–3). “Salvation in its broadest sense (inclusive of regeneration and justification) is the gracious gift of God that is appropriated through faith, and is by no means deserved due to any human merit.”¹⁰⁵

Paul is clarion clear in this passage that salvation is not appropriated on the basis of meritorious works. The condition of being saved by grace through faith is not the result of works of righteousness. However, good works (ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς) are an essential aspect of this salvation by faith through grace (2:10). Paul goes on to emphasize that believers are God's workmanship or creation (ποίημα).¹⁰⁶ The aorist passive participle, κτισθέντες, refers to the point at which the believing sinner was actually made a new creation in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).¹⁰⁷ The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ depicts the believers union with Christ. The next phrase, ἐπί ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς,

¹⁰² See Smith, *What Must I Do To Be Saved?*, 157–8.

¹⁰³ S. D. F. Salmond, “The Epistle to the Ephesians,” in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (ed. W. Robertson Nicoll; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 289.

¹⁰⁴ See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* in NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 289–90; Picirilli, “Ephesians,” 158–59; Salmond, “Ephesians,” 289.

¹⁰⁵ Sheldon, 116.

¹⁰⁶ “ποίημα,” L&N, 42.30; BDAG, 842.

¹⁰⁷ Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 290–91; Picirilli, “Commentary on Ephesians,” 159.

specifies the purpose¹⁰⁸ or goal¹⁰⁹ of God's having created us in Christ, namely, good works.¹¹⁰ These ἔργους ἀγαθοῖς are indicative of what God has created the believer to become in Christ.

Furthermore, these ἔργους ἀγαθοῖς have been prepared beforehand by God (οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός). Προητοίμασεν conveys the sense that God had prepared the good works prior to the believer's having been created in Christ with the intention that they walk in them (ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν; 2:10).¹¹¹ The divine Architect has a blueprint the lives of believers who have been created anew in Christ. It is God's design and plan that those who are in Christ to walk in or consistently practice these good works that have been prepared in advance.¹¹² The passage in Eph 2:8–10 plainly establishes the Pauline proposition that “good works are essential to being a Christian.”¹¹³

Philippians

Paul is confident God will complete the good work he had begun in the Philippian Christians (1:6). This text is often viewed as referring to the Philippians salvation.¹¹⁴ However, the immediate context indicates that the “good work” is the Philippians' partnership in the gospel (1:3–11).¹¹⁵ The Philippians had partnered with Paul at God's prompting in the endeavor to spread the gospel. Paul is certain this good work will God has initiated in them will have ongoing effects and will culminate with the return of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁶ The good work in the present

¹⁰⁸ Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms*, 162.

¹⁰⁹ Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963; 3d repr. 1987), 43; Salmond, “Ephesians,” 290.

¹¹⁰ Picirilli, “Commentary on Ephesians,” 159–60.

¹¹¹ “περιπατέω,” BDAG, 803; L&N, 41.11.

¹¹² See Picirilli, “Commentary on Ephesians,” 159; Salmond, “Ephesians,” 290–1.

¹¹³ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 118.

¹¹⁴ For example, see Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 63–4; R. R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (NAC; Nashville: B&H, 1991), 58; Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians* (HNTC; Nashville: B&H, 1999), 208.

¹¹⁵ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 119.

¹¹⁶ See Kenneth S. Wuest, “Philippians in the Greek New Testament” (WWSGNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 32–3.

context consists of prayerfully (cf. 1:18b–19) and financially supporting the advancement of the gospel of Christ (cf. 4:14–19).¹¹⁷

Phil 2:12–13

“Ὡστε, ἀγαπητοί μου, καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπηκούσατε, μὴ ὡς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου μόνον ἀλλὰ νῦν πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου, μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε· θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας.

The apostle Paul’s imperative to “work out your own salvation” is vitally connected to his concept of good works. It is no coincidence that this exhortation is in such close proximity to his recitation of Christ Hymn (2:6–11).¹¹⁸ The hymn depicts Christ’s humility and obedience to the Father.¹¹⁹ Paul introduces the hymn with the exhortation Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, imploring the Philippian’s to think the same way Christ thought. This kind of humility would result in absolute obedience to the Father.¹²⁰ After commending the Philippian’s for their consistent obedience, Paul urges them to “work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling” (2:12). In the next breath, he explains that God is the one who is working in them both to desire and to work on behalf of his good pleasure (2:13).¹²¹

An essential relationship exists between the Philippians’ obedience (2:12a) and working out their salvation (2:12b). Furthermore, God working in them enables them to both desire and to accomplish God’s good pleasure (2:13). While, “God is the one effectively at work, for the sake of His good pleasure, to enable believers to will and to achieve,”¹²² they are not passive

¹¹⁷ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 120.

¹¹⁸ See Bruce, *Philippians*, 56; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 205; Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 100–8.

¹¹⁹ See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 272.

¹²⁰ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 121.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Robert E. Picirilli, “Commentary on Philippians,” in *The Randall House Bible Commentary: Galatians Through Colossians* (Nashville: Randall House, 1988), 312.

recipients who merely “let go and let God.” Believers must be actively obedient, perusing, and accomplishing God’s good pleasure (i.e. all that pleases God).

Colossians 1:9–11

9 Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, ἵνα πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ, 10 περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν, ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες καὶ ἀυξανόμενοι τῇ ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θεοῦ, 11 ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν.

Within the context of Paul’s prayer for the Colossian believers the concept of good works occurs.

His prayer is that they walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him and bearing fruit in every good work (1:10). Bearing fruit in every good work is essential to living a life that is worthy of the Lord and fully pleasing to him. The metaphor of fruit-bearing is reminiscent of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22–23.¹²³ Paul accentuates the principle of being fruitful in every good work to an even greater extent when he reminds the Colossians about their previous alienation from God in consequence of their evil works (1:21). Their past evil behavior that had alienated them from God now stands in stark contrast to their behavior after being reconciled to God (1:22).¹²⁴

1 and 2 Thessalonians

Paul’s thanksgiving (1:3), prayers (cf. 2 Thess 1:11), and overall example demonstrates how essential good works are for believers. After expressing his gratitude for the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1), he recalls τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως, τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης, and τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος (1:3; cf. Gal 5:6). By juxtaposing ἔργου and πίστεως, Paul implies that these two

¹²³ See James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 72; Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 20; Bratcher, and Nida, *Colossians*, 16.

¹²⁴ See Dunn, *Colossians and to Philemon*, 107; Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 231; Bratcher, and Nida, *Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 31–3.

principles are not opposite ends of the spectrum. Indeed, the grammatical structure shows the work proceeds from faith. The work is the essential evidence or outgrowth of one's faith.¹²⁵

2 Thessalonian 2:16–17

16 Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ [ὁ] θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν ὁ ἀγαπήσας ἡμᾶς καὶ δοὺς παράκλησιν αἰωνίαν καὶ ἐλπίδα ἀγαθὴν ἐν χάριτι, **17** παρακαλέσαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας καὶ στηρίζαι ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἀγαθῷ.

Paul continues to weave the theme of good works into his second letter to the Thessalonians. For example, in 2 Thess 2:16–17 the apostle states his desire that the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father would encourage their hearts establish them in every good deed and word. Paul wants the Thessalonians to be encouraged in the face of opposition, and to be well established in good deeds and good words. This encompasses both Christian speech and behavior;¹²⁶ the totality of Christian existence.¹²⁷

The Pastoral Epistles

Paul's concept of good works as expressed in the Pastoral Epistles (PE) "is an integral part of the description of Christian existence."¹²⁸ In the PE, good works "becomes shorthand for describing the whole of Christian existence in its observable dimension, in terms of the fruit produced by authentic faith" ¹²⁹ Towner concludes,

Far from being another alleged indication that the author of these letters endorsed a secular, respectable social ethic as an end in itself (contra Dibelius and Conzelmann; J. Wanke, EDNT 2:245; etc.), what the new emphasis on observable Christian living in the phrase "good works" seeks rather to do is to position

¹²⁵ See Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NICNT, F. F. Bruce, gen. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 51; C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 75; James Moffatt, "The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (W. Robertson Nicoll, gen. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 24.

¹²⁶ Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 271–2.

¹²⁷ D. M. Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 259–60.

¹²⁸ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 210.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

authentic Christian existence within the world as that manner of life determined by faith in Christ that is in accordance with the values and aims of God. It falls within the overarching missiological theme of Christian existence as a life that is lived with a concern for the observation of the outsider (cf. Rom 12:17; 13:1–7; 1 Thess 4:12), within which “good deeds” as an expression of that life will be recognizable and even ideally acknowledged as such by unbelievers (cf. Rom 13:3; 1 Pet 2:12).¹³⁰

Central to Paul’s ethical teaching is that good works refers to the overall lifestyle of the Christian and sets the Christian apart distinctively from the rest of society. The ethical lifestyle of the Christian is grounded absolutely on his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians practice good works with an ultimate view of drawing the unsaved to Christ.

Following is an examination of the various occurrences of the phrase and concept of good works within the PE, it becomes clear that the concept of good works is woven inextricably into the fabric of the apostle Paul’s theology from beginning (Galatians) to end (2 Timothy).¹³¹ Indeed, it is essential for Christians to practice good works, living a life of overall obedience to God’s commands as expressed within the Christian Scriptures.¹³²

Summary and Conclusion Regarding the Apostle Paul’s Concept of Good Works

The Pauline literature is replete with references to good works yielding a substantial Pauline theology of ethical behavior. For Paul, the practice of good works is neither legalistic nor meritorious. The Pauline concept of good works is similar to those perspectives expressed in Second Temple Judaism in some respects. For example, for Paul and within Judaism the practice of good works are essential for God’s people. However, Paul’s theology of ethics is significantly

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Sheldon, *Paul’s Theology of Good Works*, 126. Refer to my Ph.D. dissertation (cited throughout the present article) for a more detailed exegetical analysis of the relevant texts within the PE.

¹³² Ibid.

distinct from various perspectives within Judaism in that Paul's ethical teaching is firmly grounded on faith in Christ. Good works are the necessary outgrowth of one's faith in Christ. Therefore good works are not meritorious, a means of gaining acceptance with God.

Paul's ethical teaching clearly demonstrates that good works are the essential result of one's faith in Christ, and outgrowth of being in union with Christ (e. g., Eph 2:8–10) and walking in the Spirit (e. g., Gal 5:16–25). Certain manifestations of good works include having an attitude that is willing to generously help those in need (2 Cor 9:8); demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit that includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness (Gal 5:22–23); obeying and living out the gospel of Christ (Phil 2:12–13); being self-controlled (Titus 2:7–8); and maintaining integrity of speech and lifestyle (Titus 2:7–8).¹³³ Good works are an integral aspect of the apostle Paul's theology. Furthermore, Paul's emphasis on doing good works throughout his letters demonstrates that good works are essential to being a Christian.

¹³³ Sheldon, *Paul's Theology of Good Works*, 134.

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