

## 2 Timothy 3:17

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     God is a worker. This morning we were considering one of God's good works, the work of perfecting or transforming His people into the likeness of Himself, of His Son, Jesus. Paul rightly lays stress on the fact that this good work is all of God from beginning to end. The words that we were thinking about this morning, He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion. The subject of the verbs there is God. God is the one who has begun and God is the one who will complete His good work. But where does that leave us? Are we altogether passive? Are good works not required of us? It's God who does His good work in us and we can simply sit back. Are we only to trust in the one who has done everything for us and is doing His own good work in us? Is that what we have to do?

Trust and gratefully accept what God has done and is doing? Well, we certainly are to trust and to gratefully accept. But as those in whom God is doing His good work, we are called in turn and as a consequence to do our good works. Now, there are many passages in the Bible that recognize this reality, this demand upon us. But this evening I want us to focus our attention on words of Paul addressed to Timothy as we find them in the passage that we read in 2 Timothy and chapter 3. And our particular interest is in the final verse. But the final verse is part of a sentence that begins in verse 16.

Certainly the manner in which the passage has been translated, you have one sentence there that covers verses 16 and 17. So, let's read again those two verses. Though, as I say, we'll be particularly honing in on what we read in the second of these two verses. So, 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The man of God, the woman of God, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Now, this passage, and particularly the two verses that we've just read, is best known and most often referred to because of the crucial place that it occupies in our doctrine of the Bible and our conviction that the Bible is in its entirety the Word of God. All Scripture is God-breathed. God-breathed out what we have in the Scriptures. He is the author. He communicated His truth through men who wrote the books of the Bible, but everything that we find in the Bible, all Scripture, is God-breathed. Now, of course, that is a huge truth with huge implications, and it's not surprising that when we look at this passage, that is a truth that often captures our concern and our attention. But this evening, we're going to leave that to one side and give attention to what is said in the passage that generally is given less attention, and that is the practical purpose of the Bible, that which is God-breathed in the life of the believer, and in particular, the place of the Bible in helping us as believers to do good works.

And this will be our main concern in the next 20 minutes or so, especially what we read in the second part of the sentence, verse 17, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Now, the way in which we're going to think about this verse, the way we're going to deal with it and explore it, is consider what it tells us about our identity as believers, as Christians, what it tells us about our mission as Christians, and what it tells us about our preparation or training. And there, we'll see what it says in verse 17, but then we'll notice how it necessarily points us back to what has just been said in the previous verse, in verse 16. So, our identity as believers, our mission as believers, and our preparation, our training as believers. And then we'll just finish by briefly noting a present and permanent challenge that arises from what we will discover here in this verse. So, let's begin then by thinking about our identity and the outline that you have there in front of you. I think the manner in which I put it was the believer's title, our identity. Paul is here speaking about one who he describes as the man of God. Just think a little bit about that terminology, that description that Paul uses.

[ 6 : 02 ] So, the man of God may be thoroughly equipped. What do we make of this language that Paul uses? Now, if we go to the Old Testament and read through the Old Testament, we'll find periodically this expression.

I even call it a title, a man of God. And in the Old Testament, it is used almost invariably to identify a prophet, to identify one among the people of God whom God had set apart for a very particular task, a special task, to be God's mouthpiece in speaking to his people. And so, you will find periodically prophets described as a man of God or a man of God. When we turn to the New Testament, we don't find the expression very often. But when we do find it, we find it certainly describing those in a position of leadership in the church, somebody perhaps equivalent to an Old Testament prophet.

But we find that the term, the expression is used in such a way to allow us, we might even go further and say that requires us to extend the title or description to all of us, all believers, to all Christians. Let's just notice one other occasion where we find this expression, man of God. Indeed, as Paul writes to the same man of God, to Timothy, but in his first letter, in 1 Timothy chapter 6, we can read there verses 11 and 12. 1 Timothy chapter 6 of the previous letter, just turning back a couple of pages, 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 11, Paul's charge to Timothy, but you, man of God, he's speaking to Timothy, he's identifying Timothy as the man of God. And Timothy, of course, was a leader in the church, but you, man of God. But notice what he urges him to do. Notice what the content of the charge is. But you, man of God, flee from all this. He's just been speaking of many things, but particularly the love of money. Flee from all this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness, fight the good fight of the faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. And he goes on.

Now, the point I want to make here, I'm not going to go into all that Paul is charging Timothy with as a man of God. The simple point I want to make is simply that you look at everything there, and there's nothing there that would be exclusively directed to those who are in leadership. There's everything that Paul says is relevant to all of us as Christians. There's nothing there you could say, ah, yes, this clearly is a charge directed to those in leadership. Timothy was in leadership, but the charge addressed to a man of God is one that applies to all of us.

And so I think it's entirely reasonable for us when we find this expression, particularly in the text we are thinking about, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Paul has in mind, certainly, Timothy, to whom he's writing, but by extension, by reasonable extension, what he says can be applied to all of us, men and women, who are believers, who are Christians.

[ 9 : 42 ] Now, this title, this description of us as men of God, women of God, a man of God, a woman of God, it's a very simple title. We might perhaps, some of us might find it a little bit forbidding. We may hesitate to think of ourselves in those terms, a man of God. We perhaps imagine that we fall short of such a description. But what does the title mean? How can we understand the words, man of God? We're thinking of our identity, and we're thinking about what this title tells us or what it suggests to us concerning our identity. Now, in the outline, I suggest three complementary ways in which we can understand this designation, man of God. Let's just run through them without delaying or detaining ourselves over long on each of them. Three ways in which we can understand this expression or designation, a man of God or a woman of God. I think in the first place, we can think of that as speaking of a man or woman created and recreated by God. A man of God in the sense of a man created by God. Now, in that sense, in that very general sense, then all without distinction are men and women of God. But I'm saying a man or woman created and recreated by God. This morning, we were thinking about God's work of recreation. We didn't use the language, but that's what we were describing,

God's good work that has begun in us, transforming us, perfecting us into the image of His Son, a work of recreation. The Bible uses that language to speak of God's work in His people. It speaks of our becoming Christians and of God's work of transformation as a work of recreation. We are born again. We are new creatures in Christ. Think of what Paul says as he writes to the believers in Corinth in the second letter in chapter 5 and verse 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, a new creation recreated by God. The old has gone, the new has come. So, in that sense, we can think of what it is to be a man of God. But also, a man or woman of God is a man or woman owned and governed by God. A man of God in that sense. Thinking of the preposition there, of in that sense. A man who belongs to God. A man who is under the government of God. Now, again, if we think of that in very general terms, we might say that that is true of all men, whether they recognize it or not. All belong to God in a general sense. All are under His authority, whether they acknowledge that or not. But it is, of course, particularly true of those of us who have been bought with a price. Again, listen to Paul as he writes to the Corinthians.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? This is in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verses 19 and 20. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God. You are not your own. You were bought at a price. A man of God, a woman of God, is one who is owned by God and who is under the government and authority of God. But then a third way in which we can understand this title that speaks of our identity is that a man or woman of God is a man or woman committed to the service of God. A man whose greatest delight is to please God. A man of God.

A godly man. A godly woman. This is what we are. This is our identity if we are believers, if we are Christian, we are men and women of God. Even if we do find the language forbidding and we feel uncomfortable that we're not worthy of the language. But that is to simply be uncomfortable with what is clearly the reality of who we are by God's grace. It is God who has made us who we are. It is God who so describes us. We are men and women of God. This is your God-given identity. That's the first thing that we wanted to just notice by simply picking up on this language that Paul uses, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. But in this verse, there is also a presentation of our mission as Christians, as believers. What is our mission as men and women of God? Well, what does the verse say about our mission? Well, our mission, our calling, our task is to do good. Our mission is every good work so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Now, as a congregation in what we might call an evangelical tradition, we're sometimes wary, or we are wary of a religion of good works, of work salvation is sometimes the language that we use. The suggestion that we can somehow gain our salvation by our good works, that our good works are meritorious, and that by doing good,

God will save us, God will save us. And quite rightly, we reject that as being contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture, that it is not by our good works that we gain acceptance with God. But in rightly rejecting as such a manner of understanding what salvation is all about, we need to be clear that our quarrel is not with good works is not with good works, but with the place that they occupy in God's plan of salvation. And they do occupy a place, we might say a place of honor. Paul, when he writes to the Christians in Ephesus, and he presents this wonderful presentation of God's work of salvation in us in the second chapter of that letter, it comes to a conclusion concerning the purpose of all that God is doing.

[ 16 : 37 ] And the purpose is that we might do the good works that He has prepared for us. Let's just remind ourselves of what Paul says there. The words are familiar to us. Let's just limit ourselves to the final verse of all that he says in that chapter in verse 10, final verse of the section of Ephesians 2 verse 10, for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do. In fact, these words of Paul writing to the Ephesians, this verse ties together very neatly of what we were considering this morning, of God's work. Paul there speaks of believers as God's workmanship.

It ties together that reality of believers as God's work, as God's workmanship, but also that that work of God is creating or fashioning us to do good works. We are God's workmanship that we might in turn do the good works that He has prepared for us. When we tie this in with what we were saying about God's work in us, having as its ultimate goal that we would be ever more like Jesus, and the importance and place of good works becomes even more clear, more evident. What do we see in the life and ministry of Jesus as it's recorded for us in the Gospels? Well, we could say a great deal about it, but we can certainly say this, that Jesus was tirelessly engaged in doing good. Matthew gives us a summary, if you wish, of Jesus' public ministry in chapter 9 of Matthew in verse 35, and how does he summarize what Jesus was about, what He was doing? Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. No doubt we could think about each aspect of that and talk about it, but if we think about it in summary, what is being described? What is being described is a man who was about doing good works. What about some examples of good works for us? If that is what we have been created and recreated for, if as God's workmanship, we have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do, well, what are they? What are these good works? If we are equipped for every good work, to return to our text, what are these good works? Well, the language in our text equipped for every good work, even that little word every, does suggest that there's any number of possibilities, a wide range of possibilities of good works for us to do. Well, rather than me give you that endless list, I guess it's impossible to give you an endless list, but even not wanting to try to do that. Let me suggest three places where we are called to do good works as God's workmanship. We are called to do good works in the church that we are part of, that God has called us to be part of, works of ministry, works of service. In fact, I think we could say that this was Paul's first concern in writing to Timothy. This was Paul's focus as he urges Timothy that he would be equipped for every good work and that in turn he would equip others. In Timothy's case,

Paul was concerned for the calling that Timothy had to ministry within God's church. We say that because in the following chapter, following on from what he says, he then gives Timothy this charge.

The end of verse 1 of chapter 4, I give you this charge, preach the word, be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke and encourage, and so he goes on. And Paul speaks very clearly of Timothy's ministry in the church and to God's people. And these are the good works that Timothy has to perform, that he's been equipped to perform, and that he has to do. Well, that's true of us also.

We are to do good works within the life and ministry and witness of our congregation. We're starting the summer, and in the summer we know there's a certain lull in the activities of our congregation. I think that's true of most congregations, certainly true here in Bonacord.

[ 21 : 30 ] But as the summer very quickly comes to an end, August will very, very soon be upon us. And when August is upon us, there'll be any number of tasks that need to be formed, perform good works that need to be done. New teachers for Sunday school, help with the teens group, extra helpers at Little Lambs, given the huge number of moms and wee ones that come along week by week, volunteers for the food bank, printing newsletters, offering hospitality to students and to new folk. As the congregation changes, as people leave for whatever reason, people who before were helping and serving in different ways, well, they're not here to do that. And others need to take their place. Plenty of good works that we have to do, that we are equipped to do as God's people. Indeed, God works in us in order that we might in turn do these good works.

They can be formal things like the ones I've mentioned are, I suppose, formal, but they can also be quiet, under the radar ways of doing good works. A phone call, an email, a word in season, and so many other ways in which all of us can be doing good works within the life and ministry of the congregation. So, in the church, but also in our homes. And I don't want to drive an unbiblical wedge between these different places, if you wish, but for the reasons of just description, let's make the distinction. In church, at home, your home is a theater, a place for good works. I was just thinking about this very fleetingly, I have to confess. And I would wager that we would have, all of us, we would have much happier homes if we saw our home as a place to do every good work. I think sometimes, and certainly I can speak for myself, I wouldn't presume to speak for others, but I think sometimes we think of our home as the one place where we can get away with not doing good works. Well, in church, we have to do what's required of us, we have to, you know, be up to the tasks that are given to us, but then we get home and we can relax, and we can maybe be careless in this matter of doing every good work in church, at home, and then out there in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, in our colleges, or universities, where we mingle, where we meet with others, out there. Jesus was very much out there doing good works. We need to creatively and proactively identify ways in which we can serve our neighbors and our neighborhood out there. The man of God is a man marked and characterized by every good work. So, our identity, our mission, certainly one aspect of it, the one that is focused on in our text. But then finally, our training or preparation for this mission. Paul says that we are to be thoroughly equipped. The language itself is interesting and convicting. We sometimes imagine that the work or service we offer in the church or on a voluntary basis can be just good enough. Well, it's just something I'm volunteering to do. Nobody obliges me. Nobody can force me. I'll do what I can. I'll do what's good enough. But when we read Paul's description of the need to be thoroughly equipped, I think the idea that good enough is good enough won't do. We are to be thoroughly equipped for every good work that God calls us to and that God gives us the opportunity to do. Well, how are we to be thoroughly equipped?

Let's just notice three elements of this. First of all, the means of our training or preparation. Well, this is what verse 16 is all about, and then it leads on into verse 17. The Scriptures, all Scripture, the Bible, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. The means of our training or preparation are the Scriptures, the Bible. We won't dwell on that. It's not our purpose this evening. But the nature of our training or preparation is that it is to be thorough, thoroughly equipped, thorough training, thorough preparation will require a thorough grasp of the Scriptures, of the Bible. The Scriptures can best serve to train us as we engage with them, as we engage with the Bible in multiple or parallel ways.

We listen to the Scriptures as we gather as God's people on the Lord's day to hear God's Word preached. That's one way in which we're fed and equipped. We listen. We read the Bible for ourselves.

We study the Bible when we're not content simply with a reading of a passage, useful though that is, but when we detain ourselves for a moment to study it and to consider what it has to say to us. Study very much related to the idea of meditating on the Scriptures as we pray and read and pray and seek to hear what God is saying to us day by day. Now for that, there are so many ways that can help us.

[ 27 : 36 ] Many folks in the congregation, and many of you I'm sure, will use Bible study notes of one kind or another, ones that are distributed in a slightly more formal way, are the explore Bible notes. A number of you make use of them, and I would encourage those who don't to do so. If the Scriptures are the means that God has provided to thoroughly equip us, then they will only achieve that purpose in the measure that we thoroughly engage with them.

Listening to a sermon preached of a Sunday simply won't be sufficient for us to be thoroughly equipped.

The nature of our training or preparation is that it must be thorough, and then the purpose of our training is that we would be equipped. And I don't have much to say about this other than one thought for you to chew on. If you sometimes feel that you are ill-equipped for service as a Christian, maybe in a particular sphere of service, you feel that you are ill-equipped, it might be because you are.

Now that doesn't seem very encouraging, but it's something to ponder on. Maybe the reason you feel that is because it's true. And why is it true? Well, perhaps it's true because you're not engaging with the Bible in this thorough and serious way. Paul says that is the way in which we become equipped.

If we're not making use of the means that God has provided, then it ought not to be a surprise to us if we find ourselves on occasion ill-equipped. It's probably because we are.

[ 29 : 19 ] But the point is that we can correct that. We don't need to put our hands up in the air and say, oh, well, that's terrible. Isn't that very sad? Well, there's nothing I can do. No, the means are there for us to be equipped.

Let me finish with what I'm calling a present and pressing challenge. On the outline, I've called it the believer's challenge. Our present and pressing challenge. And here I'm simply going to make use of the words that Paul uses as he goes on in the letter to address himself very directly to Timothy in chapter 4. And in verse 1, we read these words at the end of the verse, I give you this charge. And we've read that already.

But it's this language of Paul, I give you this charge. But what Paul is saying to Timothy, really, it's simple enough. He's saying, just do it. You have the scriptures. You have the means. You have been trained. You have been prepared. You are being equipped. And that's all good. But now you've got to do it. How foolish it would be to be thoroughly equipped and then to do nothing. You know, how foolish it would be to be trained for 7, 10 years, I don't know, as a doctor, the best teachers, the best university. And you're thoroughly equipped. And then you never actually do anything to attend to the sick. What's the point of being equipped if you're not going to do anything? And Paul is saying here to Timothy, you are equipped. You're being equipped. Now I give you this charge. Do what you have been called to do. And of course, that charge extends to us. It extends to you also. You have been created and saved for good works. You have been and are being trained and equipped for good works. Now just get out there and do them. Let me give a practical challenge for each of us. Consider one good work that you could do or perhaps do better in the three areas that we mentioned, church, home, and out there in the city or where you move and work day by day. Think about something that you can do this week, not something that's too vague or too distant or maybe too ambitious, but something very practical that you can do this week that we've begun. I think when you're thinking about your home, when you're thinking about out there, that shouldn't be too difficult to identify. If you're thinking about the church, especially at the moment, just as the summer begins, maybe you'll think about something that will be a little bit further ahead. Maybe not. Maybe you'll think of something that you could do this week. But if it's a little bit further ahead, fine. But think of something specific and do it.

As Paul says to Timothy, I give you this charge. Preach the Word. Do what you have been prepared to do. Do what you have been called to do. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Let's pray.