

4wps REWARDS FOR THE BELIEVERS' GOOD WORKS

30-Dec-13, 31-Dec-13, 4-Ene - 14, 9-Jan-14, 5-Feb-14, 6-Feb-14, 7-Feb-14, 9-Feb14, 19-FEB-14, 20-Feb-14, 21-Feb-14, 2-Mar-14. 6-Mar-14. 8-Aug-15, 10-Aug-15

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INTRODUCTION

God prepared beforehand the good works that he wants us to do *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* Ephesians 2:10. Then he puts them in our path, reminds us in our conscience when it is time to do them *"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come"* John 16:13. He also gives us the willingness as well as the power to do them *"For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose"* Philippians 2:13. The good works God prepared beforehand for us and will remind us of them by the Holy Spirit and will give us the will and the ability to do them are the most important witness to our neighbors, more important than our words. Jesus said: *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"* Matthew 5:16 (NIV). According to Paul, if we obey the Spirit in our conscience and do in every situation what He suggests to us, *"our neighbors will know that we are Christians by our love"*, while we are just obeying His commandment *"love your neighbor as yourself."* On top of that God will give us eternal rewards for doing these works! I believe that this is the meaning of building with "gold, silver, and precious stones." This lesson is about these good works and their rewards. Why would He reward us for doing the good works which He has prepared for us? Is it not already enough to give us eternal life and make us the bride of His Son by pure grace? As we will see today, this is what the Scriptures say: the good works of believers have great value!

A. SALVATION IS NOT BY DOING GOOD WORKS

1. Before time began, Salvation has been granted freely only to the elected:

Ephesians 1:3-5 GOD'S WORD Translation (GW)

3 Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through Christ, God has blessed us with **every** spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer. **4 Before the creation of the world, he chose us** through Christ to be holy and perfect in his presence. **5** Because of his love **he had already decided** to adopt us through Jesus Christ. He **freely chose** to do this.

Acts 13:48 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**

Romans 8:29-30 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

29 For those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; **30** and these whom He **predestined**, He also **called**; and these whom He **called**, He also **justified**; and these whom He **justified**, He also **glorified**.

Ephesians 1:11 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

11 Also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose** who works all things **after the counsel of His will**,

2 Timothy 1:9 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

9 Who has **saved us and called us** with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own **purpose** and **grace** which was granted us in Christ Jesus **from all eternity**.

Most Christians believe that we are predestined since before the creation of the world because it is very clear in Scripture. However, there are different ways to interpret this predestination. **Some believe** that God had a plan for us, chose us to be saved before creating us and decreed that those He chose would be saved by grace, that is, God chose all those He wanted, predestined, called them and gave them the faith to believe in His Son John 6:44, Ephesians 2:8. **Others believe** that it is not God who chose us but we had to choose Him and believe in Jesus Christ John 3:16, 36; and that as God knew in advance who were going to believe, He predestined us based in His foreknowledge:

1 Peter 1:1-2 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen **2** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

The Good News translation, and other versions, does not use the word foreknowledge but chosen. But the word "foreknew" could also mean that in spite of knowing how sinful we would be, he chose us anyway.

1 Peter 1:1-2 Good News Translation (GNT)

1 From Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ — To God's chosen people who live as refugees scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. **2 You were chosen according to the purpose of God the Father** and were made a holy people by his Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be purified by his blood.

And the same Peter says a few lines later that **"His mercy has caused us to be born again,"** indicating that it was not us who decided to be born again, but His grace did. Actually nobody can see the Kingdom of God without having been born again first! John 3:3. When a person sees the Kingdom and believes it is because God already gave him life. We were **dead**; and God gave us life first so we could believe! Ephesians 2:4.

1 Peter 1:3 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

2. Either way I am sure of my salvation because I believe in Jesus. If it is God who caused me to believe because I had already been chosen, or if I believed because my mother guided me to Jesus, or the missionary who brought God's Word to my house, or simply because it occurred to me to believe, either way I am saved because I believe. But all of us agree that salvation is by the grace of God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not by what we do, but by what the Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit did and keep doing for us and in us. We were dead in our sins, He made us alive *Ephesians 2:1* and saved us by pure grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*, without any merit in us.

However, good deeds are **emphasized** in the Scriptures, but **not for sinners to be saved** but for those already saved **because we were saved to do good works**. We have seen this in our previous lesson. But our theme today is that God will **reward** the good works **of the believers already saved**, and believers already saved that **do not do** these good works that God prepared for them **will be saved anyway**, but they will not have rewards or prizes in the afterlife.

B. TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF BUILDING MATERIALS

1. To build our spiritual lives upon Jesus Christ our Savior, we are given two different kinds of materials to choose from. Some are **indestructible, spiritual and eternal** and others are **vulnerable, material and transitory**. These materials indicate two different kinds of works, actions or behaviors.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

11 For no **man can lay a foundation** other than the one which is laid, which is **Jesus Christ**. **12** Now if any man builds **on the foundation** with **gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw**, **13** each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with **fire**, and the fire itself will test the **quality of each man's work**. **14** If any man's work which he has built on it **remains**, he **will receive a reward**. **15** If any man's work is burned up, he will **suffer loss**; but **he himself will be saved**, yet so as through fire.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 Good News Translation (GNT)

11 For God has already placed **Jesus Christ** as the one and only foundation, and **no other foundation can be laid**. **12** Some will use **gold or silver or precious stones** in building on the foundation; others will use **wood or grass or straw**. **13** And the **quality** of each person's work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day fire will reveal everyone's work; the fire will test it and show its real quality. **14** If what was built on the foundation **survives** the fire, the builder will receive a **reward**. **15** But if your work is burnt up, then you will **lose it**; but **you yourself will be saved**, as if you had escaped through the fire.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 The Message (MSG)

9-15 Or, to put it another way, you are God's house. Using the gift God gave me as a good architect, I designed blueprints; Apollos is putting up the walls. Let each carpenter who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation! Remember, there is only one foundation, the one already laid: Jesus Christ. **Take particular care in picking out your building materials.** Eventually **there is going to be an inspection.** If you use **cheap or inferior** materials, you'll be found out. The inspection will be thorough and rigorous. **You won't get by with a thing.** If your work passes inspection, fine; if it doesn't, **your part of the building will be torn out** and started over. But **you won't be torn out**; you'll survive — but just barely.

2. **Notice!** The **foundation** of our eternal salvation is Jesus Christ, **nothing and no other** one. There is **no other foundation.** The Divinity did not share the responsibility of saving us sinners with anyone. It is not our merit, sacrifices, works or behavior; but the **sheer grace** of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Upon **Christ, the Foundation of our salvation**, we, saved by grace, are given the opportunity and choice of building our spiritual life, **with God's help.** There are two kinds of building materials within grace; one is invulnerable and incorruptible: "*gold, silver and precious stones*" and the other class of materials is vulnerable and corruptible: "*wood, grass and straw*". The first three materials are resistant to fire, the other three are not. Remember that we are talking about the **works of believers already saved**, not of sinners to be saved. We are talking about works **prepared by God beforehand** for us to do 1 Corinthians 2:10, works that He also promised to give us the **willingness and the ability** to do them. All of us, who build on Jesus Christ as the cornerstone, are **saved believers.** We build upon the salvation we already have in Him. Those of us who choose "*gold, silver and precious stones*" to build our spiritual lives in Christ, are saved, have eternal life and **in addition will receive extra eternal rewards.** Those of us who choose "*wood, hay and straw*", **are also saved** and have eternal life **but will not receive extra rewards.** It is possible that all of us will build using both kinds of materials at various times in our lives, but the only works that will be rewarded are those prepared by God for us beforehand, works made with invulnerable materials. The rest is burned and eliminated.

2 Corinthians 5:10 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

10 For we must **all appear** before the **judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may be **recompensed** for his deeds in the body, **according to what he has done**, whether good or bad.

I believe that The Judgment Seat of Christ is not the final judgment of the Great White Throne Revelation 20:11-15, but a tribunal for giving rewards **for the works of saved believers** only. This "Judgment Seat of Christ" has nothing to do with Salvation or condemnation. We are all saved there, but some will receive rewards, others not. It's a court for **"us"** believers only.

3. "Gold, silver and precious stones" are **indestructible** materials that are **eternal** and **resist the fire** and the examination at the Judgment Seat of Christ. These are **eternal spiritual values**, which do not perish and therefore will accompany us forever. This is the treasure we are depositing up in heaven. Paul does not explain the meaning of these materials, but as I examine myself and compare them with the three most important spiritual virtues **for me**, in my Christian life, I arrived at the following conclusion. You decide which are the three most important spiritual virtues for you in your spiritual life that may be your "gold, silver, and precious stones". This is the meaning for me:

For me **Gold** symbolizes the most valuable material. As I am a son of God, begotten by Him John 1:13, the most valuable and first virtue for me is my **continuous and intimate relationship** with my father God. That is, to live and walk in the Spirit, be attentive to His guidance and obeying Him when he speaks to me in my conscience letting me know what He desires of me. God is omnipresent and is in us all the time and everywhere, so there is no excuse for not living continuously in communion with Him, dialoguing with Him all the time, anywhere. To live for Him, enjoy Him and be guided by Him is my first priority in life. The Heidelberg Catechism puts it wonderfully in their first question:

Question: "What is your only comfort in life and death?"

Answer: "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him."

Romans 14:7-9

The Westminster Catechism says:

Question: What is the chief end of man? □

Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Silver, the second important virtue in my life is **Holiness**. My desire is to live a clean life trying to overcome the temptations of the world with the strength that God Himself gives me. He promised to help me and He won't allow me to be tempted more than I can bear, and will always give me an exit so I can endure it 1 Corinthians 10:13 and I believe it.

Precious stones to me are **people**, human beings 1 Peter 2:5, my family, neighbors, friends and enemies; the poor and the needy. Love them all, help them in their

needs, reconcile them with God, and disciple them. This is to build precious stones, namely precious lives and friendships for eternity.

Other Biblical examples of works that will be rewarded are: giving a glass of fresh water to a child Matthew 10:42, helping the poor Luke 14:12-14, doing voluntary work without pay to spread the Gospel 1 Corinthians 9:16-17, doing everything as unto the Lord Colossians 3:22-24. Imagine the number of opportunities that we have to do good works within salvation!

Maimonides, a Spanish Rabbi, physician and philosopher (1135-1204), defined eight levels of charity or good works, each higher than the previous level. (Mishné Torá, under laws of charity records 10:7-14.)

1. The lower level is when one gives to charity grudgingly, but gives.
2. One higher level is when one gives inadequately, but of good cheer and a smile.
3. One higher level is when one gives to a poor person if being asked.
4. One higher level is when one gives to a poor person when not asked to.
5. One higher level of charity is when one does not know to whom he gives, but the recipient knows who gave to him.
6. One higher level of charity is when one knows to whom he gives, but the recipient doesn't know who gave to him.
7. One higher level of charity is to give without knowing to whom you give, and without the receiver knowing who gave it to him.
8. The highest level is to help a Jewish brother by giving a gift or a loan, or entering society with him, or finding him a job, in order that the recipient does not need to depend on others any longer.

But Paul goes even further:

1 Corinthians 13:3 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

3 And if I **give all my possessions to feed the poor**, and if I surrender my body to be burned, **but do not have love**, it profits me **nothing**.

God does not only look at the **works we do** or how much **we give**, but the motivations of our inner person. Good works without love have no eternal value and will not have a reward in heaven, although it does help the receiver meet a need. Love is the Fruit of the Holy Spirit, another gift of grace. Those who give to be seen and be recognized will not receive a reward in heaven. They already had it here on earth.

Matthew 6:1-4 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

6 Beware of practicing your righteousness before men **to be noticed** by them; otherwise you have **no reward with your Father** who is in heaven. **2** So when you give to the poor, **do not sound a trumpet before you**, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, **they have their reward in full.** **3** But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that **your giving will be in secret**; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret **will reward you.**

4. How do we know these works will follow us in eternity? Because John says:

Revelation 14:13 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

13 And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for **their deeds follow** with them."

I don't know if the rewards are medals, an honor roll, ornaments of gold, silver and precious stones, a nicer home or special privileges. But what would a gold medal mean if the streets are already made of gold? What greater reward is there than being the bride of the Son of God and belonging to the Divine Family? Maybe the rewards will be to be part of the Government of the eternal Kingdom Luke 19:12-19. I really don't know and it doesn't matter because what greater reward is there for us than to live forever, be with Jesus, His angels and all the Saints, and our dear family and friends who went before us and to be the bride of Christ? However, God, on top of all that, will reward us for the good things we did within His grace, obeying His guidance, and following the perceptions that the Holy Spirit gives us continually. The good works He prepared beforehand will be made known to us by the Holy Spirit and what is written in His Word.

The Lord Jesus Christ says that to do these works is to **"build up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not penetrate or steal"** Matthew 6:20. What might those treasures be in a place where the streets will be of gold, the gates of Pearl, and its walls of sparkling gemstones? What can be more than that? Revelation 21:10-24.

5. St. Paul also says:

Galatians 6:6-10 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

6 The one who is taught the word **is to share** all good things with the **one who teaches him.** **7** Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever **a man sows**, this **he will also reap.** **8** For the one who sows **to his own flesh** will from the flesh reap **corruption**, but the one who **sows to the Spirit** will from the Spirit **reap eternal life.** **9** Let us not lose heart in **doing good**, for **in due time** we will reap if we do not grow weary. **10** So then, **while we have opportunity**, let us **do good to all people**, and **especially to those who are of the household** of the faith.

In this passage Paul tells us that to sow to the flesh is what we invest in our vanities and physical bodies. There are, of course, essential things in life in which we have to invest for our survival, there are others that are necessary, but not essential. But there are also many things we spend money, time and talents on that are superfluous. The superfluous we spend on our flesh will end up being eaten by the worms. All the stuff we acquire cannot be taken to Heaven because they are perishable. Sowing for the Spirit is what we invest in spiritual and eternal virtues such as activating the fruit of the Spirit, doing well to others, etc. These will give us an eternal harvest. *"In due time we will reap"* means when we are in heaven. *"As we have opportunity"* means to do our good works while we are here on earth because after we die perhaps we will no longer be able to help anyone here Luke 16:23-31. Paul also includes in **sowing** to the Spirit, helping those who teach us God's Word and those who disciple us. He also tells us that in our charity we should think first about the brothers and sister in the faith who are poor, people who are incapacitated, widows and orphans James 6:10 1:27.

6. I think it is not correct to teach believers that to *"sow the seed"* is only putting money in the offering plate during church services or sending it to the TV or radio preachers without first knowing how that money is going to be spent. I don't know if my tithes and offerings I am investing in the spirit will have rewards in heaven unless I know how it is going to be spent. It must be used for eternal things that pass through the fire of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Very few times do I hear people saying that to sow seeds is to invite poor neighbors to dinner at our home in order to witness to them, or to help a widow of the Church, or an orphan, or a newly arrived foreigner, or a neighbor in need, or giving scholarships to the young people of poor families to help them get a good job and have a successful career, or to help hard working poor people earn a degree specializing in whatever they are doing so they can get better jobs. If we just hand out money to poor people for food, etc. they will just become dependent. The church will not be able to maintain them forever, so we end up accomplishing nothing. But if we help them to study, get a job, or a better job, the church will eventually receive more money from their tithes and offerings and we will be able to continue to intelligently help others in need and end poverty in the next generation of church members.

I often hear that planting seeds is sending offerings to the radio and TV preachers or putting it in the offering plate without knowing how that money will be used. I praise God for those who give to the poor Proverbs 19:17. But in many instances, most of the money is used for material things that will be burned by fire and will not

enter eternity and there is little or nothing used for the poor and needy. Of course, there are many ministries that exist to help the poor, but they are the minority because our modern church system is very expensive to maintain and sometimes the salaries of the leaders are disproportionate to those earned by the average of members of a church.

7. Do not think that believers should expect the Government to end poverty. Politicians, with very few exceptions, have lied to us. They are the only ones who become rich with the tax money that the government collects that are supposed to help the poor. We, the Church, are like a small nation within the nation. We are God's Kingdom. The rules of God's Kingdom are different than those of the governments of the world. Our constitution is the New Testament. Most of the politicians promise to help the poor only to gain power and then they become rich themselves while the poor remain poor. But in the Kingdom of God good works are a result of love and not of law. We have the duty to eradicate poverty at least among the citizens of the Kingdom of God in our Congregation:

Acts 4:32-35 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. **34** For **there was not a needy person among them**, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales **35** and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Many opine that the early church believed that Christ's return was imminent because Jesus had promised to come soon for the elect. Also because of the hard tribulation and persecution of apocalyptic proportions they were experiencing under the Jews and the Roman Empire, which was further evidence for them that the end was at hand, believers had no problems in selling all their possessions. Anyway, they thought the Lord was coming soon for them with riches and glory Luke 18:6-8, 22. This is why we read that when all the Jerusalem Church income was spent and there were no more possessions to sell, they all became poor and needed the new gentile churches to help them Romans 15:25-26, Galatians 2:9-10. Their love for their brothers, sisters and neighbors was a great witness to the world Acts 2:47. Perhaps the methodology was wrong because everyone ended up with nothing because the coming of Christ was not yet at hand, but the spirit of love and interest for each other **was not wrong**. Though we may not copy the method of the early believers, we should learn and copy their love for each other. Those who have much more than they need could also take the primitive believers as an example.

I believe that history has taught us that the solution to end poverty is not simply to give money to the poor. In countries where the government began to subsidize the poor and redistributing wealth, the number of poor persons actually increased. In communist countries, almost everyone ended up being poor with exception of the leaders. Just giving money to the poor does not end poverty and promotes dependency. Eventually the money of the government is not enough to support everyone in the system and the economy collapses. We need to create a Kingdom of God economic system that teach poor believers to help themselves through education and decent work, and provide them the tools to accomplish it, so that they become earners with dignity that comes with earning their own money, which will also raise their self esteem ² Thessalonians 3:10. Of course, there has to be economical help for the sick and handicapped but not for everyone who is jobless. The only way to end joblessness is to create jobs.

Members of the church who are professionals, in business, and all those who by their study and effort have achieved a better life, should form a group of thinkers and create a system that motivates young people to study and follow a career. The church **should dedicate the major part of the income in tithes and offerings** to building an account dedicated to provide scholarships for poor families' children and loans for business projects that will produce jobs. Those who gain jobs could return the loans in reasonable installments so the Kingdom Bank could continue helping others.

This is what the parables of the talents and minas meant ^{Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-26:}
"The one which has more because he knew how to administer it, will be given more to administer; but the one who has little because he did not know how to administer it, even that little will be taken away from him before he loses it and will be given to the one who has more because he will know how to administer it."

Each Church must eradicate poverty from among its members, making them producers of wealth instead on depending on others. That wealth will be invested to create more producers who will invest... etc. This system will eradicate poverty among believers first and then it could be extended to their relatives and friends until our Lord comes back.

In the early Church, mutual help was so important that at first the Apostles themselves served the tables for the poor widows ^{Acts 6:1-7.} Each Church has a cream of members more successful than others, because they studied and had faith to start businesses. They were good stewards of the opportunities they had, learned

how to save, invest, etc. Those who are successful should get together and develop a project to help primarily *"the household of faith"* Galatians 6:10 and train others to do likewise. Then extend this intelligent service to family members and unsaved friends of believers, thus creating a wonderful tool for witnessing in a practical way of loving our neighbor, just as God commanded us.

With this in mind in our Church of Hidalgo Street in Buenos Aires we started a cooperative that lowered the price of foodstuffs during the great "Rodrigazo" inflation (a colossal hyperinflation under Argentina president Rodriguez). Since in our cell groups we knew who were the most in need, we were able to help them in an intelligent and practical way. Many were supplied with tools for their work. For example, the church bought an industrial sewing machine for a widow who maintained her family sewing on an old Singer pedal machine. She was then able to produce the same amount of work in half the time so her income doubled. Also down payments were provided to buy property that otherwise would have been impossible, etc. This is "sowing to the Spirit" Galatians 6:9-10 because we believed that the Holy Spirit was guiding us. At the Crystal Cathedral, we taught English as a second language in our Sunday School, motivating young Hispanic people to study. For those who did not have a High School degree, we had a program to teach that also in our church. Many graduated from that program and now have good jobs. We also motivated some in our church to start a company that provides maid service. We helped a man who cleaned swimming pools to buy that small business and provide work for others, etc.

In the book of Acts and in the Epistles, because they did not have buildings to be kept, the offerings were usually just to help the poor and support missionaries, Acts 2:44-46, 4:34-37, 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, etc. *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, specially to those in the family of believers"*. Once we succeed in eradicating poverty among believers where we have jurisdiction, then we can go to the government and, instead of giving them a Bible as a gift as is often done in Latin countries, show them an example of what the believer in Christ **produces** and teach them how to do it. We have often seen that subsidies from rich countries to poor countries, passing through the hands of the government, often do not actually reach the poor. Subsidies that the government gives out are very expensive because much of the money is lost along the way and ends up in the pockets of intermediaries. But in the Church, everything would be done with integrity and honesty. In this way the ideas, talent and money we invest in helping the poor would produce much more, with much less.

One of my relatives, a retired pastor in Argentina, started "My Brother's Home", which consists of giving hospitality to relatives of very ill people from the interior of the province who are brought to the General Hospital in the city. The relatives come to take care of their sick at the hospital during the day, but do not have a place to stay each night. The ministry also gives them breakfast before they leave and dinner in the evening when they come back. They can also get a bath and can wash their clothes there. When the government saw how they provided that service at so little cost, the government gave them **two other public help houses** to help poor people that had previously required much more of the people's tax money and yet inefficiently provided very bad service. The government could not believe how much the church did with much less money. The church, with **much less** money and with lots of love, not only gave bed and food to the people but also counseling, prayer and salvation in Jesus!

To sow to the Spirit is to support Christian workers, reconcile people with God, and help the poor. To plant seed is to do good to all, and especially to the household of faith. To sow for the Spirit is not only putting money in the offering plate but to also help our poor neighbors, and do charity for those in need, This would be the best testimony to impress relatives and unsaved friends of believers and make it easier to witness to them about the love of God.

Matthew 5:16 New American Standard (NAS)

16 So your let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father that is in heaven.

8. "*Gold, silver and precious stones*" 1 Corinthians 3:12-14 signify good works that will endure and pass the test of the Judgment Seat of Christ, because they will be rewarded, are eternal and will accompany us in glory Revelation 14:13. Sowing to the Spirit is "*to set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, set your minds on things above not on the earthly things...*" Colossians 3:1-2. It is "*to fix our eyes not in what is seen, but in what is unseen; for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*" 2 Corinthians 4:16. Also the tribulations and persecution for following Christ "*produces an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all comparison*" 2 Corinthians 4:17. The story of the rich man and Lazarus indicate the difference between sowing to the flesh and sowing to the Spirit Luke 16:19-24.

These are just a few examples in Scripture of what we should be investing our time, talents, and money. You can find many more Scriptures that will indicate the

difference between investing in transitory and fleeting things of the flesh and imperishable works in the spiritual realm Hebrews 12:27-29. But the main source of the knowledge of what we should do and not do is through the guiding of the Holy Spirit. Personally, the Spirit that is in my conscience tells me when I'm sowing superfluous things for my flesh and when I'm planting for my eternal spiritual being. It is in my eternal person where I want to invest the most. Of course, we have to invest something in our flesh, but **how much and how far?** The Spirit will indicate it to us.

9. We must make a budget both at home and at church, and designate a sum of money, time and talent to build for eternity. God **lets us use our discretion** where to invest: "*gold, silver and precious stones or wood, hay and stubble.*" Whatever we build on Him does not change our eternal salvation, which is based on what **Jesus and Him alone** has done. But, yes, what we build upon our salvation 1 Corinthians 3:11:14 **indicates our spirituality**. This is why walking in the Spirit is essential to have insight into where to invest our time, talents, knowledge and money. Whoever walks in the Spirit will surely invest in the Spirit also. When you spend money, time, talents, etc. always discern if you are building up gold, silver and precious stones or wood, hay and stubble. The latter does not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us discern our investments.

Hebrews 13:15-16 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a **sacrifice of praise** to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. **16** And do not neglect **doing good and sharing**, for with such sacrifices **God is pleased**.

In this passage the Lord gives credit to our songs and verbal expressions of praise, "*the fruit of our lips*", that praise and bear witness to His Name and also gives credit when we "*do good and share with others*". These things, praise and mutual help, replace the useless sacrifices Hebrews 10:4-10 of animals under the Law.

10. Why does God give us rewards for the good works we do under grace? One reason may be to motivate us to help those most in need, to react positively when His spirit speaks to us with a need and to eradicate the poverty among the people of God. Also to prove that He is not against good works. He is against believing that good works can save! But after you are saved, he encourages you to do good works and even helps us to do them. But make sure you know that your salvation does not depend on those works but in **His Grace alone**. This reinforces for eternity the truth that our salvation was not by works but by grace. Also, when we see many

brothers and sisters there in glory for eternity, saved by grace in spite of having built with perishable things like **“wood, hay and stubble”**, that will remind us for eternity that they are there not because of their works, but they are saved because God chose them by grace. Even though they did not endeavor to sow to the Spirit, doing the perfect will of God when He presented them the equal opportunity in their consciences to build with eternal materials, but chose the perishable ones instead, they are still in glory by grace, because they have the foundation, that is Christ

1 Corinthians 3:15.

Also those who have rewards, which we don't know what they will be but it must be something important and wonderful, will be sure that they are not saved by those works, but by the grace of Jesus Christ, so that no one may boast. Another reason could be that God, though He predestined us, does not eliminate our freedom to decide with what materials to build. These good works which *“He prepared beforehand for us to do”*, are not forced on us. We do them if we want to and not do them if we don't want to. This shows forever that salvation was not by our works, because though wood, hay and stubble were not acceptable, we are in heaven anyway.

Those who are saved and are in glory *“as one who escapes from fire”* have believed and trusted Jesus for their salvation and invoked His name, but built only perishable things, spending all in material things. The vain works that burned are the investments we made in things that are neither spiritual nor eternal.

11. **Wood**, instead of gold. These are believers who attend the meetings, sing, praise, are fervent in services but privately they are not spiritual, and do not have a continuous and intimate **relationship** with God. They are honest, but they have not grown spiritually. They like the preacher, music, meetings, but they are not so in love with the Lord as to dedicate all of themselves to Him. Still they are very busy with the requirements of the world. They always ask for the pastor and others to pray for them. They are spiritually weak and dependent on others. They like the things of the world, things that though they are not sin, such as sports, politics and social gatherings, are more important to them than spiritual activities. But they are saved because they believe in Jesus and they invoked His name for their salvation. They have the Foundation of salvation, but they have built with wood which is better than hay and straw but that burns just the same.

Hay, instead of silver: These are believers who are like many of the saints from the Scripture, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, the Kings of Israel such as David

and Solomon and many others, who had faith in God but were also overcome by the temptations of the flesh, like money, power, sex, alcohol and even murder. They sometimes repented, but returned to fall again. They obeyed because they feared God and believed in Him but their lives were not spiritually deep enough and they liked the things of the world too much. These believers do not live in Holiness, as God wants, as those committed to the Lord live, but are saved because they trusted in God for their salvation and their faith was counted for righteousness. God keeps His promises and they have the Foundation of salvation which is Christ, but sadly to say, they built with hay on top of their salvation.

Straw, leaves or foliage, instead of precious stones: These are also saved believers because they trusted in Jesus for their salvation, but don't think about people like their neighbor, to help them and win them to Christ. They only live for themselves and they are happy to save themselves by God's grace! They love vacations, luxury, sport, amenities, travel, parties, and all things that although they are not sin, occupy an important place in their lives. They are not concerned with the poor or to win their neighbors for Christ, or for missions, but they are saved because they trusted in Jesus, but sadly they build with the wrong materials. Some times they do charity but prefer to have the applause and rewards here on earth. The works that are done to be seen by others and not motivated by love, are not valid either.

Matthew 6:2-4 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

2 "So when you give to the poor, **do not sound a trumpet before you**, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, **so that they may be honored by men**. Truly I say to you, **they have their reward in full**. **3** But when you give to the poor, **do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing**, **4** so that your giving will **be in secret**; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret **will reward you**.

12. Surely you know people in the church who are building upon Christ the Foundation using gold, silver and precious stones, and others who build only with wood, hay and stubble. Sometimes we judge those who build with these perishable materials and think that they are not saved, but it is not so. If God judged all of us by the works we do, none would be saved! Look to the saints of the Bible: Abraham, David, Peter, and Thomas. They were all very imperfect. But of course, God is pleased when **we, believers**, do good works, so he always urges us, inspires us and expects us to do these works by love.

B. DEAD GOOD WORKS WITHOUT VALUE

1. **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** New American Standard Bible (NASB)

13 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a **noisy gong or a clanging cymbal**. **2** If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, **I am nothing**. **3** And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, **it profits me nothing**.

Good deeds that have no value and will not receive a reward are those that Paul calls "*dead works*" Hebrews 6:1. These are works that are made because of an interest in receiving a reward or fearing a punishment. When Paul says "*dead works*" he is referring to works forced by the law, like: "*if you give your tithes, God will prosper you*" or for fear of curses "*if you don't you will be accursed*" Malachi 3:7-12. The law promised material blessings to those who paid their tithes and materials and curses to those who did not. So people gave expecting God to bless and multiply their income, not by love and obedience. Or it was given for fear of punishment and curses to their homes and their work. This was clearly indicated by the law Malachi 3:8-9, Deuteronomy 28:1-68

These works, done to receive a reward or out of fear of a punishment, are hateful to God. So much so that Paul says that one has to repent of doing these kind of good deeds, they are worthless Hebrews 6:1. He recommends we cry unto the blood of Christ so that we get cleaned of that attitude Hebrews 9:14. Why does God hate those works so much? Because if it weren't for fear of punishment or interest in the reward, they would not do them, therefore these works have no value. These works are called dead because they do not exist for God and whoever does them for that reason must repent and ask to be covered by the blood of Christ in order to be cleansed of this sin, and begin to obey out of love and give out of love.

To illustrate: suppose that when I want my wife to kiss me, I have to call the police to force her to do it. If she gives me that kiss, it is a dead kiss, without any value. And if when I ask her for a kiss I have to pay her \$50 to get it, it is also a dead kiss, a kiss without value. If she kisses me for fear of the police or because of the money those are dead kisses! It is detestable because it is like prostitutes who perform sex for money, not for love.

2. Paul says: "*If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; **but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire***" 1 Corinthians 3:15. Fire is a symbol of testing, purification and examination as in the case of Job Job 23:10). Gold is tested and refined by fire that burns off the dross and slag resulting in the gold becoming purer. Paul means that wood, hay and stubble will not pass the test of fire.

Note that those who have built wood, hay and stubble over Christ's foundation are still saved because they built on the right Foundation, but have no rewards. We do not lose our salvation because salvation is only by Christ and not by our works; but we will not have rewards. For example: tithing is a duty for every **honest** believer. It is the part of the profits that are shared with God because we use His trees, minerals, animals and everything He created. It all belongs to Him and we use it to earn money. If one does not pay the tithe of what he or she earns using God's resources, it would be dishonesty, but, again, one does not lose their salvation because one is not saved by tithing but through Jesus Christ. However, you lose the eternal reward of the righteous tithers. That is why we will see in heaven those who did not pay their tithes, but we will also see those with their rewards who paid tithes. Remember, **salvation is through Christ alone**. It is not by Christ and St. Paul, or by Christ and the Virgin Mary, or by Christ and the Bible, or by Christ and the tithe, or by Christ and the gift of tongues. It is by Christ and no one or nothing else. There is no other name under heaven to save us. In Christ we are complete. This does not mean that we should not honor Paul, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Bible and tithing, but it means that Christ alone is enough for our salvation.

3. Paul tells us all this, I think, to emphasize the fact that salvation is not by works but by faith in Jesus Christ *alone*. Those who do not have rewards will be saying for eternity "**Salvation is only through Jesus Christ and his grace**". Those who were rewarded for their good works after they were saved will be reminded that they **should not boast** of them, because they are not there because of those good works, but by the grace of God. Also even the good works that they did as believers were made because *"The Lord prepared them beforehand so that we may walk in them"*. This is very clear in all of Scriptures Ephesians 2:10, Matthew 6:19-20. The difference between the two groups is that one did the good deeds indicated to them by the Spirit and the other did not. Also to prove that salvation is not by works but by grace, Paul says regarding those who built with wood, hay and stubble "**he will be saved, but as from a fire**". Dear Brothers and Sisters, the good deeds done under grace glorify God and bless us! Acts 2:21; 4:11.

Matthew 5:16 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

We have to make sure that our works are not limited to the perishable ones, but also those that remain. For example, when we reconcile people with God, they will

join us in heaven for eternity, so they are "*precious stones*." These will be our best friends for eternity.

Luke 16:9 New Living Translation (NLT)

9 Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources **to benefit others and make friends**. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, **they will welcome you** to an eternal home.

Luke 16:9 New Century Version (NCV)

9 I tell you, **make friends for yourselves using worldly riches** so that when those riches are gone, **you will be welcomed in those homes that continue forever**.

4. The people that we have blessed by helping them here on Earth will be our eternal friends in heaven. Also the people we led to Christ with our testimony by inviting them to dinner, helping them and discipling them, will be our eternal friends. Those who benefit from the money we give to missionaries and evangelists also will accompany us in glory and will be our grateful friends for eternity as well as the poor that we helped. I'm looking forward to getting to heaven to see the missionaries who brought Christ to my parents before I was born and those who gave their financial support for them to come to Argentina. I will be a friend to them.

Good works that can withstand the test of fire, death and judgment, will accompany us for eternity. But let us remember forever that if we get to glory it is because this was God's purpose and grace:

2 Timothy 1:9 Living Bible (TLB)

9 It is he who saved us and chose us for his holy work not because we deserved it but because that was his plan long before the world began — to show his love and kindness to us through Christ.

5 **Attention!** I repeat, these good works, which we do under grace, are not necessary **to** be saved but to be done by those who **are already** saved and have the fruit of the Holy Spirit. One wonders if He has already given us eternal salvation then what greater reward is there than that? The rewards are based on what we do inside of His grace; this is, by "**occupying ourselves in our salvation with reverence and fear**" and obeying the voice of the Spirit in our conscience:

Philippians 2:12-13 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; **13** for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13 Living Bible (TLB)

12 Dearest friends, when I was there with you, you were always so careful to follow my instructions. And now that I am away you must be even more careful to do the good things that result from being saved, **obeying God with deep reverence**, shrinking back from all that might displease him. **13** For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then helping you do what he wants.

Philippians 2:12-13 Good News Translation (GNT)

12 So then, dear friends, as you always obeyed me when I was with you, it is even more important that you obey me now while I am away from you. **Keep on working with fear and trembling** to complete your salvation, **13** because God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose.

Philippians 2:12-13 Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)

12 My dear friends, you always obeyed what you were taught. Just as you obeyed when I was with you, it is even more important for you to obey now that I am not there. So **you must continue to live in a way that gives meaning to your salvation. Do this with fear and respect for God.** **13** Yes, it is God who is working in you. He helps you want to do what pleases him, and he gives you the power to do it.

This Scripture that encourages us to get busy at our salvation with fear and trembling could read thus: *"As it is God who gives us both the desire and the power to do good works, then do them with diligence!"* and then we will be rewarded and have them in our account for eternity. We can do this by discerning and practicing our spiritual perception that tells us what are the works that God puts ahead of us and then doing them. As He helps us to, let us obey Him with respect, zeal and devotion.

CONCLUSION

How He loves us! After giving us salvation by grace and without conditions, because He proposed it Himself, ^{2 Timothy 1:9}, He tells us in our conscience (spirit) what He expects of us, offers us opportunities to do it, gives us the desire and the power to do so, puts His desires in our way and still lets us decide if we want to do it or not. Finally, He gives us extra rewards if we choose to do it. If we do not do it we lose our rewards but we **do not lose** our salvation, because salvation is not by works but by grace. My children are my children because I am their father, not because of their behavior.

God is so full of love that He is always looking for what more He can do for his elected because we are the future bride He chose for his Son. After choosing us and predestinating us to join his Son and become like Him ^{Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:3-6}, and choosing us before the ages to reign with his Son, yet, if we do good works that He puts in our way in this world, He gives us rewards! **What a wonderful father-in-law we have! How He loves us!**