
The Doctrine of Good Works: Reclaiming a Neglected Protestant Teaching. By Thomas H. McCall, Caleb T. Friedeman, and Matt T. Friedeman. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. Paper, \$27.99.

For decades, Baker Books has published a wide variety of worthwhile Christian books. I still own many books by Arthur W. Pink that were at one time published by Baker. Over the years, Baker has published many titles by D. A. Carson, Millard Erickson, James Montgomery Boice, and Craig Keener. The *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* is a highly-rated series.

However, beginning in 2008 with the inaugural volume on Mark in the now-complete *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* series, Baker has increasingly published books favorable to Roman Catholicism. In 2009, Baker published *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* by Francis J. Beckwith, the president of ETS who resigned after he was received back into the Catholic Church. Baker has published two books by Catholic apologist Robert Barron: *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization* (2015) and *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (2021). Most recently, Baker launched the series, *A Catholic Biblical Theology of the Sacraments*, with the publication of “The Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church” (2023) by the Dominican, Romanus Cessario.

It was therefore no surprise when Baker, several years ago, published *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (2017) and *Gospel Allegiance: What Faith in Jesus Misses for Salvation in Christ* (2019). In these two books, author Matthew W. Bates redefines *faith* as “allegiance” and teaches salvation by works. *The Doctrine of Good Works: Reclaiming a Neglected Protestant Teaching*, with glowing endorsements by Matthew Bates and Ben Witherington, is more of the same.

A book on the doctrine of good works is beneficial and necessary. The Bible certainly encourages and even commands the practice of good works, but I know of no book that specifically addresses that topic. As the authors of *The Doctrine of Good Works* point out: “Textbooks [Erickson, Bird, Grudem] commonly used in evangelical theological education do not contain a *locus* (or similar sustained treatment) on the doctrine of good works” (p. xiii). However, *The Doctrine of Good Works* fails miserably on multiple counts to be the book on good works that is needed.

In their introduction, the authors state that they “argue from Scripture and the resources of the Protestant confessional traditions for a recovery of a positive doctrine of good works” (p. xvi). They assert that this doctrine is positive “in the sense that good works are actually integral to the good news” and that it is Protestant “with respect to basic and fundamental theological commitments” (p. xvi). After the introduction, the book contains “a historical survey of the doctrine of good works in the major Protestant traditions” (p. xvi), followed by a chapter discussing good works in the Old and New Testaments and a chapter that presents a theological summary. The final two chapters are completely different from the first four and could be jettisoned entirely. They involve case studies of congregations and ministry leaders performing “works of mercy” in their communities. Some of the churches referenced have women pastors. The book ends with a conclusion, subject, and Scripture indices. There is no bibliography.

The authors believe that because “the doctrine of salvation is broader than the doctrine of justification” (p. 110), good works are not necessary for justification but are necessary for salvation. They believe good works are a necessary evidence of salvation. They hopelessly misinterpret Matthew 25, concluding that “good works play an important role in final judgment: Jesus will judge all people based on their good works toward the needy (whether Christians or people in general)” (p. 73).

In their discussion of good works in the early church in Acts, it is inexcusable that they never reference Peter’s saying that Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38) or Paul’s admonishing the Ephesian elders to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). These omissions bring to light one of the huge failings of the book. The Pauline Epistles mention *good work* in nine verses (2 Cor 9:8; Phil 1:6; Col 1:10; 1 Tim 3:1; 5:10; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; Titus 1:16; 3:1) and *good works* in ten verses (Rom 13:3; Eph 2:10; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14). Yet, other than Eph 2:10, the only verse mentioned by the authors is Titus 2:14, which is partially quoted four times with no comment or exegesis. No other verse makes it into even a footnote.

Question: How can one write a book about the doctrine of good works without mentioning the majority of Bible verses that refer to good works? Answer: By having an agenda to pollute the gospel of the grace of God by adding to it the necessity of works for final salvation.

How could a Christian ever know for sure that he has done enough good works, either quantitatively or qualitatively, to make it through the last judgment? This is another critical issue that the authors never mention.

Because *The Doctrine of Good Works* not only perverts the gospel of Christ, but also fails in so many ways to live up to its title, the book has no redeeming value whatsoever.

Laurence M. Vance
Vance Publications
Orlando, FL

One Body, One Spirit: Disability and Community in the Church.

By B. Jason Epps and Paul Petitt. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministries, 2024. 204 pp. Paper, \$18.99.

This book was written to encourage believers and churches to reach out to disabled people. They are often overlooked not just in society but in churches. The authors maintain that this is a large but neglected group, as 25 percent of people have some kind of disability (p. 29).

The authors relate many personal stories of those who have struggled with disabilities. They tell of one couple who adopted a special needs child and experienced a multitude of problems. The church they attended was not sensitive to their needs. The couple could not attend church together because of the lack of help they received (pp. 36-37). They eventually changed churches and attended one that reached out to them.

Chapter two deals with the physical barriers at church that impact people with disabilities. These include parking, entrances and doorways, stairwells, bathrooms, and even coffee bars. The authors point out what many may not even consider. People with disabilities may need help in taking communion (p. 54).

Chapter three discusses social barriers. I found a comment by the authors jarring because it shows how our culture can affect how we see disabled people. We want to replace the old with those who are young and healthy. Many would not want a disabled person to sing in the choir because of "practical" concerns. Subconsciously, we might view a handicapped person as "less than" those who are not (p. 61).

In a summary statement, the authors ask if we see the disabled as a burden or a blessing. Such people can add to the ministry of a church