

The Formula of Concord

Lesson Five

On Salvation and Good Works

Introduction

1. Because the Bible teaches, and Christians believe, that people are justified “by faith without the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28), what temptation is there when it comes to good works?
2. Why could we say it is “natural” to think that no one would be concerned about living a righteous life unless they are threatened with punishment or motivated by reward to be earned?
3. Read the following passages.

Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

John 15:13-14 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

Are they saying opposite things?

Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. It kills the old “Adam” and makes us altogether different people, in heart and spirit and mind and all powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. It is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them.” (SD IV:10,11)

Digging In – **GOOD WORKS**

What are good works?

4. What has changed in us as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts? (2 Corinthians 5:17; Psalm 40:8)

5. What are God's goals for those who are now Christians? (1 Thessalonians 4:3,4; Ephesians 2:20)
6. Who alone is able to do works that are considered good by God? (Hebrews 11:6; Galatians 5:22-24)
7. What motivates a believer to do good works? (Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15; Philippians 1:27,28)
8. How does a believer know what works are truly good in God's sight? (Psalm 119:105; Psalm 119:9; Matthew 15:3,6,9)
9. How is it possible that God can consider something done by a Christian, who still remains a sinner, to be truly good? (John 15:5; Galatians 2:20)

Historical Background

George Major

- George Major was a leading proponent of a wrong way of speaking about the relation of salvation and works.
 - o Said, "I do confess that I...will teach all my life: that good works are necessary to salvation...Nobody is ever saved...without good works. It is impossible for a man to be saved without good works."

Digging In

1. In view of the following passages, can we give Major the benefit of the doubt and let his statement stand?

Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Romans 4:6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

Major did not want to teach work-righteousness. He was taking very seriously the statements of the Bible that speak of God giving us salvation based on the evidence of our works. Works show the attitude of our hearts – love for God that is fostered by God’s love for us and his gracious forgiveness. Major was trying to reflect that truth by saying “good works are necessary for salvation”.

2. What two things was Major confusing?

It is our teaching, faith, and confession: 1. That good works follow from true faith (when it is not a dead faith but a living faith), as certainly and without doubt as fruit from a good tree. 2. We also believe, teach, and confess that at the same time, good works must be completely excluded from any questions of salvation as well as from the article on our justification before God, as the apostle testifies in clear terms, ‘So also David declares that salvation pertains to that person alone to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works, saying, “Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered”’ (Rom. 4:6-8), and also ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast’ (Eph 2:8-9).” (Epitome IV: 5-7)

Historical Background

First some theologians split over the following expressions. The first party wrote: good works are necessary for salvation; it is impossible to be saved without good works; and no one has ever been saved without good works. Against this position the other party wrote: good works are harmful to salvation. (Epitome IV: 2)

Later a split occurred among some theologians over the two words ‘necessary’ and ‘free.’ One party argued that the word ‘necessary’ should not be used in regard to new obedience, which does not flow from necessity and compulsion but rather from a spontaneous spirit. The other party retained the word ‘necessary’ because such obedience is not subject to our discretion, but rather reborn human beings are bound to render such obedience. (Epitome IV: 3)

Digging In

Are Good Works Necessary?

1. Look at these two statements:

Because you love me, you must do what I want.

Because you love me, you cannot help but do what I want.

What impression does each sentence give you about why we should obey that person?

Now consider this change:

Because you love me, it is necessary to do what I want you to do.

Because you love me, you can’t help seeing how necessary it is to do what I want you to do.

2. What does Jesus mean when he says that he obeys his Father's will and remains in his love?

John 15:10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

3. So, what can a person mean if they were to say that good works are 'necessary'?

Because of God's love for us, good works _____ flow from our faith, without _____, other than the motivation supplied by God's _____ for us.

We also believe, teach, and confess that all people, particularly those who have been reborn and renewed through the Holy Spirit, are obligated to do good works. 4. In this sense the words 'necessary,' 'should,' and 'must' are used correctly, in Christian fashion, also in regard to the reborn; in no way is such use contrary to the pattern of sound words and speech." (Epitome IV:8,9)

When the word 'necessary' is used, it should not be understood as coercion but only as the order of the unchangeable will of God, to which we are bound. (SD IV:16)

Application

- ✪ How does the following quote help us see the need to be careful in our use of words like "should," "necessary," and "must" when talking about sanctification?

What is the dark side of piety? It is the kind of piety that puts "me" at the center. My natural, sinful flesh wants to use piety to get something. That something could be God's favor. It could be personal happiness. It could be the results of a moral life on my health or relationships. It could even be eternal life. The hardest part of all the "me" motivations to diagnose and combat is the bare desire to become pious because that is what Christians are supposed to be. It is a yearning for piety because of the piety I see in others but that I have yet to achieve myself. It is the desire to be upright because that is the right way to be. It is the desire to find wholeness in my life, the kind that comes through not having to struggle against the sinful nature. The dark side of piety is recognized not only by a skewed desire for piety but also by what happens when we see what we consider to be progress or by what we are willing to do in order to achieve our goal. Pride, not joy comes with growth in this kind of piety. The Christian's focus becomes his or her personal yearning, striving, obedience and yielding...A calm reliance and trust in the Lord and reliance on the power of his Word gives way to impatience. (Robert Koester, Gospel Motivation, pg. 167-168)

- ✪ What reality in Christians do we always have to remember? What implications does this reality have? (Romans 7:15-20; Philippians 3:12)
- ✪ What reality of Christ in relation to our good works do we have to remember? (Galatians 2:20; Luke 17:10)
- ✪ How does the concept of “reward” fit into a discussion of good works and our lives of sanctification? (Matthew 10:42)

Historical Background

Nicholas Amsdorf

- To combat Major, Amsdorf swung the pendulum in the other direction.
 - Said that good works were harmful for salvation.
- 1. This was a foolish statement, yet the Formula of Concord dealt with it. What point did the Formula writers make?

If people want to draw good works into the article on justification and base their righteousness or confidence in salvation upon it and thereby want to merit God's grace and become saved, then not only we state but Paul himself repeats three times in Philippians 3 that works are not only loss and rubbish for such people but even harmful. (SD IV:37)

Application

- ✪ Evaluate: Good works are necessary to salvation, not in order to obtain, but to retain, salvation.
- ✪ Evaluate: Man must be diligent in good works after justification.
- ✪ What overemphasis must we avoid in the interest of a sound doctrine regarding good works?

- ☛ Article IV defends the teaching of salvation and good works. How does this article preserve and protect the gospel and the teaching of God's grace?

Summary

Christians come to faith by the Word working through the power of the Holy Spirit. We need not and cannot do anything to acquire faith and salvation. Yet once saved, God's people blossom with good works because God has been so good to us. We rejoice in his mercy in Christ and seek to do his will.

Only faith in Christ justifies and saves us. Good works contribute nothing to salvation before, during, or after conversion. However, it is offensive to say that good works harm salvation, unless they are mixed in with the article of justification.

Nevertheless, the Christian will do good works. They will be a natural part of our new life in Christ because of the Lord's command, to avoid carnal security, and for the glory of God.

Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone.

We don't do good works to get to heaven; we do good works because we already have heaven.

During the Week

Read Article V of the Formula of Concord, Epitome.

V. OF THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

STATUS CONTROVERSIAE.

The Principal Question In This Controversy.

1] Whether the preaching of the Holy Gospel is properly not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and reproof, rebuking unbelief, which, they say, is rebuked not in the Law, but alone through the Gospel.

AFFIRMATIVA.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

2] 1. We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church with great diligence as an especially brilliant light, by which, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God is rightly divided.

3] 2. We believe, teach, and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reprove everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.

4] 3. For this reason, then, everything that reprove sin is, and belongs to, the preaching of the Law.

5] 4. But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, is to believe, namely, that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and has obtained and acquired for him, without any merit of his [no merit of the sinner intervening], forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.

6] 5. But since the term *Gospel* is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach, and confess that if by the term Gospel is understood the entire doctrine of Christ which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1, 15; Acts 20, 21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins.

7] 6. But if the Law and the Gospel, likewise also Moses himself [as] a teacher of the Law and Christ as a preacher of the Gospel are contrasted with one another, we believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but comforts consciences against the terrors of the Law, points alone to the merit of Christ, and raises them up again by the lovely preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit.

8] 7. As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites [who swell with the opinion of their own righteousness] as the Pharisees, or despair like Judas, Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually, Matt. 5, 21ff ; Rom. 7, 14. And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners [Rom. 1, 18], how great it is; by this means they are directed [sent back] to the Law, and then first learn from it to know aright their sins—a knowledge which Moses never could have forced out of them.

9] Accordingly, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath, whereby men are first led into the Law aright, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, none of which we can observe, and therefore are to seek all our righteousness in Christ:

10] 8. Yet as long as all this (namely, Christ's suffering and death) proclaims God's wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and

therefore a foreign work of Christ, by which He arrives at His proper office, that is, to preach grace, console, and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel.

NEGATIVA.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

11] Accordingly we reject and regard as incorrect and injurious the dogma that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace; for thereby the Gospel is again converted into a doctrine of the Law, the merit of Christ and Holy Scripture are obscured, Christians robbed of true consolation, and the door is opened again to [the errors and superstitions of] the Papacy.