

## LORD'S DAY 24

62. Q. But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it?

A. Because the righteousness  
Which can stand before God's judgment  
Must be absolutely perfect  
and in complete agreement  
with the law of God,<sup>1</sup>  
whereas even our best works in this life  
are all imperfect and defiled with sin.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Deuteronomy 27:26** 'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

**Galatians 3:10** For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

2. **Isaiah 64:6** But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

63. Q. But do our good works earn nothing, even though God promises to reward them in this life and the next?<sup>1</sup>

A. This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Matthew 5:12** "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you..."

**Hebrews 11:6** But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

2. **Luke 17:10** "So likewise you, when you have done

all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

**2 Timothy 4:7,8** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

64. Q. Does this teaching not make people careless and wicked?

A. No.  
It is impossible  
that those grafted into Christ  
by true faith should not bring forth  
fruits of thankfulness.<sup>1</sup>

1. **Matthew 7:18** A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

**Luke 6:43-45** For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>44</sup> For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup> A good man out of the good

treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

**John 15:5** I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

In the previous Lord's Day we learned that we are saved by the work of Christ. He not only forgives us all our sins, but He has also rendered perfect obedience as our Representative. The result is that God looks at us as though we have never sinned, and as if we had obeyed God's law perfectly, without ever having transgressed even one of God's commandments. We also learned that the only way that we can partake in Christ's redeeming work is by faith. Not that faith itself makes us righteous, as though faith was some sort of good work which replaces obedience to the law. No, faith is as much a gift as is the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ.

Now the Catechism wants to ward off another thought, namely, that we are saved because of our good works.

The church of Rome taught that man was not totally depraved. They taught that man still had some good left in him, and by that good he was still capable of performing good works. Rome also taught that these good works were a necessary contribution towards salvation. To be sure, they acknowledged man's weakness and sin. They also acknowledged the need for the grace of the forgiveness of sins which comes through faith. Yet at the same time they taught that salvation depended upon the good works of men. It is this error which the Catechism wishes to refute in the first place.

Rome: Faith + Good Works = Salvation.

The first thing that we should notice in this Lord's Day is that the Catechism accepts the idea that we can do good works. That is quite amazing, considering that the Catechism said earlier that we *are inclined to all evil and incapable of doing any good* (cf. Lord's Day 2). Is there a contradiction in our confession? Do we actually agree with the church of Rome? Is man only partially depraved? How can we explain this?

The answer is that God makes us able to do good works again. By nature we can

do nothing good. However, through the Holy Spirit working in us, we are able to do good works. We have already seen that the Holy Spirit works faith into our hearts. That is the first gift that we receive from God. Through faith, we also receive other gifts, such as the forgiveness of sins and righteousness (Lord's Day 23). In addition to these gifts, we also receive the gift of renewal - the renewal of our hearts. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, our old, hard and corrupt heart is replaced by a new, pliable and pure heart, a heart that is filled with a love for God and His commandments, a heart that wants to please God by walking according to His laws. We receive a heart transplant, so that once again we are made willing and able to do good works.

The amazing thing about good works is that they too are a gift from God. When we do something good, we might be inclined to pat ourselves on the back and give ourselves credit for this. Yet we deserve no credit. The good works that we perform are actually the work of God the Holy Spirit within us. In Ephesians 2:10, we read that God prepared beforehand the good works which we do. That means that from eternity God planned that we should do the good that we do. Even before we do something good, God had it written in His book. He planned it. He sent His Holy Spirit to make us willing and able to the good that we do. Paul writes in Philippians 2:13 "*for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*" You understand, therefore, that the good works that we do are not really our own works. They are the works that the Holy Spirit works in us. Good works are the fruit of the indwelling Spirit of God.

This work of the Spirit is the result of the saving work of Christ. Christ earned salvation for us, and in doing so, He earned the right to renew us and enable us to do good works again. Since we are saved by Christ, we are once again able to do good works.

Having said this, you will understand that Rome had turned things around. Rome

says that good works lead to salvation. Yet it is just the opposite: salvation leads to good works. Salvation is not the result of good works, but good works are the result of salvation.

**Rome:**

good works lead to salvation

**Reformed:**

salvation leads to good works

For this reason, our good works cannot merit us anything. We cannot claim a reward from God because of the good works we do. If we tried, God would turn around and say, *You have that all wrong. I do not have to thank and reward you for your good works. You have to thank Me for them. For it is I who have made you willing and able to do them.*

Another reason why our good works cannot merit us any reward is because the good works we do are imperfect. Even though the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, there is another power at work in us as well, the power of sin. Although we have been given a new nature, remnants of the old nature cling to us as well. And because of these remnants of the old nature, everything we do is imperfect. Isaiah wrote, *“But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away”* (Isaiah 64:6). God still regards our works as good, but they are not perfect. And only those works that are perfect receive a reward from God. God demands **one hundred percent** before any one can merit anything.

However, does not Scripture say that those who do good works will receive a reward? Yes. In Psalm 19:11 we read, *In keeping God's law, there is great reward.* In Revelation 22:12 we read, *“I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”* Scripture indeed says that God will reward the good works that we do. Yet as the Catechism rightly explains, *this reward is of grace.* That is, we do

not deserve the reward. For grace is “undeserved favour.” We do not earn God's favour by the works that we do. God is pleased to crown His own works in us with a reward. That is the way that Art 24 of our Belgic Confession speaks.

Perhaps an example will illustrate this. A father would like his car washed. He asks his son to do it and promises to pay him five dollars. The son agrees. There is only one problem. The son's arms are both completely paralysed. He cannot lift them or move them. He could never earn those five dollars. Yet it is his father's desire that he does earn that reward. Therefore the father takes hold of his son's arms, and places a washing glove on his hand. He dips his son's hand into the pail of water and then rubs the side of the car. He does this again and again until the whole car is washed. The job is not done as well as it could have been, and there are a few streaks here and there. Yet the father rewards his son by giving him the five dollars promised. The son has not earned it. Yet it was the father's will to give it though it was really undeserved. So it is with God and us. He enables us to do good works. They are not our works, nor are they perfect. Thus they do not deserve a reward. Yet it pleases God to reward them nonetheless.

Yet if we are saved by grace alone, and if our good works do not contribute to our salvation, why should anyone bother to do good works? If we are saved in virtue of Christ's obedience to God's law, why should we still keep God's commandments? This is the question which the church of Rome asked. They felt that if salvation was given freely, apart from good works, then people would become careless and worldly (profane). For them, the only incentive to do good works was the goal of salvation. They taught that men could only earn salvation by works. They tried to frighten people into obeying God.

Yet the Reformers spoke from Scripture and said that it would be impossible for those who are saved by grace not to bear fruits of thankfulness. Why? Because salvation does not only consist

of the forgiveness of sins, or justification. Salvation also consists of sanctification. We are freed from the guilt of sin as well as from the power and tyranny of sin. Those who are washed by the blood of Christ are also washed with the Spirit of Christ. By this Holy Spirit, those who are saved also receive a new heart that seeks to show thankfulness to God by way of obedience. Those who are justified (declared 'Not Guilty') are also sanctified (given a new heart which desires to please God. (cf. James 2:14-16, Titus 2:14, John 15:5). Therefore Christ said, *“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.”* (Matthew 7:17,18).

Think also of the text we quoted from Philippians 2:13 *“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”* God works a desire in the redeemed to do what pleases Him. He makes them willing. Consider also Romans 8:14, *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.* God leads His sons in obedience and faithfulness. The words of John say the same: No one who lives in him keeps on

sinning (cf.1 John 3:6 NIV). Again we say it is impossible for the redeemed not to do good works.

What incentive do we have, then, to do good works? We have at least four good reasons. In the first place, we glorify God when we do good works, for then we reflect His goodness and that is something that we want to do. Since God has been so good to us, we love Him and we want to show our thankfulness to Him and to give Him honour and praise. We can do that by doing good works. In the second place, the good we do attracts others, and by our good works we can win our neighbour for Christ. In the third place, we obtain for ourselves a good reward, for God is pleased to crown our good works with rewards in this life and in the life to come. In the fourth place, we receive assurance of God's grace of salvation when we see ourselves bearing the fruits of salvation. (We will discuss this more fully in Lord's Day 32).

Look at the diagram below, which shows us from Lord's Day 23 and 24, the gifts that we receive from Christ.

<p>1. For by grace you have been saved through <b>FAITH</b>; and that not of yourselves <b>it is the gift of God</b>, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FAITH, a gift of God</p>	<p>2. God is the source of your life in <b>Christ</b>, who God made <b>our ... RIGHTEOUSNESS</b> (1 Corinthians 1:30).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FAITH, a gift of God</p>
<p>3. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for <b>GOOD WORKS, which God prepared beforehand</b>, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GOOD WORKS prepared by God</p> <p style="text-align: center;">RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FAITH, a gift of God</p>	<p>4. By keeping the ordinances of God there is great <b>reward</b> (Psalm 19:11).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REWARD through grace</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GOOD WORKS prepared by God</p> <p style="text-align: center;">RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FAITH, a gift of God</p>



**Questions:**

1. What does the church of Rome teach about the ability of man to do good works?
2. According to the church of Rome, what role do good works play in the salvation of man?
3. Since we by nature are inclined to all evil and incapable of doing any good works, why does the Catechism speak about us doing good works?
4. What do texts such as Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 2:13 teach us about good works?
5. Before any work can merit (be worthy of) a reward, what is required of that work?
6. Can our good works merit (earn, be worthy of) a reward? Why (not)? Give two reasons.
7. If our good works do not merit anything, will they be rewarded? If so, on what basis?
8. If good works do not contribute anything to our salvation, will we still do good works? Why (not)?
9. What incentives are there for doing good works?