

## A study of Jesus Christ

Last week we started with an introduction of a study of good works. We will now unpack good works in more detail and divide the topic into six questions.

- I. What are good works?
- II. How may they be performed?
- III. Are the works of the saints pure and perfectly good?
- IV. How can our works please God since they are only imperfectly good?
- V. Why must we perform good works?
- VI. Do our good works merit anything in the sight of God?

### I. What are good works?

Good works are those works that are performed according to the law of God, those that proceed from a true faith, and are directed to the glory of God.

Three things should be considered when answering this question, namely,

1. The conditions necessary to qualify a work to be a good work in the sight of God. When we study these conditions we also need to look at what conditions would disqualify a work as a good work. Firstly, then, what qualifies a work as a good work:

a) It must be commanded by God. No creature has the right or power to institute the worship of God. Morally good works and the worship of God are the same. It may be profitable to first look at morally good works and then naturally good works.

Morally good works differ widely from natural good works, inasmuch as all actions, in as far as they are actions may be naturally good, but all actions are not morally good, or in accordance with the justice of God. This condition excludes all self-will worship as well as the figment of good intentions, where someone will do evil so that good may come, or when they perform works founded upon their own

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imaginings, which they endeavor to thrust upon God in the place of worship, which are not evil in themselves, but they are evil because they are not commanded by God.

It is not sufficient for the worship of God that a work is not necessarily evil or not prohibited, it must be commanded by God, according to what Scripture teaches,

Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. (1 Sam 15:22)

I am the LORD your God; follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ez 20:19)

They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. (Matt 15:9)

There are good works, however, that are not specifically commanded by God and yet, may be pleasing to Him. They are not pleasing to God in themselves, but indirectly in as far as they partake of the general nature of love for the gospel; in as far as they are performed for the purpose of avoiding offence; and for the sake of contributing to the salvation of our fellow men. In this respect they are commanded by God in general and not specifically.

b) For a work to be good it must proceed from a true faith, which rests upon the merit and intercession of Christ and from that we may know that we, together with our works, are acceptable to God for the sake of the Mediator.

To do anything from a true faith is, firstly, to believe that we are acceptable to God for the sake of the satisfaction of Christ. Secondly, that our obedience is pleasing to God, both because it is commanded by Him, and because the imperfection, which attaches itself to it, is made acceptable to God for the sake of the same satisfaction of Christ because of which God is well pleased with us. Without faith it is impossible for anyone to please God. It is also not the faith itself that makes any particular work sufficient, for if this were all that is necessary, then the wicked who know and do what God wills, will also act from faith.

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To act from a true faith, however, includes much more than this, because it includes in itself historical faith, and what is the most important of all, it applies unto itself the promise of the gospel, by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Rom 14:22, 23 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Heb 11:6 And 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 seek Him.

It is also not difficult to see the reason and force of this doctrine, because without faith there is no love for God, and consequently no love for our neighbor. Every work that does not proceed from love for God is hypocrisy and a reproach and contempt of God. He who has the presumption to do anything, regardless whether it is pleasing to God, despises God and casts a reproach upon him. It is also not possible for us to have a good conscience without faith and what is done without a good conscience cannot please God.

c) For a work to be good it must be for the honor and glory of God. Honor embraces love, reverence, obedience and gratitude. Hence, to do anything to the honor of God is to do it in such a manner that we may testify our love, reverence and obedience to God all for the sake of showing our thankfulness for the benefits that we have received.

There is a necessity that our works, in order that they may be good and acceptable to God, should be for His glory and not for our own praise or advantage. If our works fail in that purpose, they cannot proceed from the love of God but from a desire (perhaps a hidden desire) to advance our own selfish interests and will thus be mere hypocrisy.

God must, therefore, be the first and only object whenever we do anything and we must not cringe from or care about what men may say; whether they praise or reproach us.

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From what Scripture teaches we may have full assurance that we please God in what we do, "...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (I Cor 10:31)

We may also lawfully and profitably desire and seek God's glory in what we do, according to what is written, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matt 5:16)

To summarize, faith is required for good works because if we are not firmly persuaded that our works are pleasing to God, they proceed from contempt of God. That good works may only flow from God's command is necessary because faith comes from God and no one else. Inasmuch as there cannot be any faith apart from the God, there cannot, likewise, be any good works independent of it.

It is necessary that whatever we do, we do for the glory of God, because of we seek praise other than that of God, our works cannot please God.

The following works are disqualified as good works according to what we have said above.

- a) Works that are sins in themselves. No work, contrary to the divine law and the will of God as revealed in his word, can be a good work.
- b) Works that are not necessarily opposed to the divine law and which in themselves are neither good nor evil, such as actions of indifference, but which may become evil by accident, cannot be good works.

These works might not be opposed to the divine law as such, but they are not commanded by God, but by men, and become evil and sinful when they are done with man's interpretation of what constitutes lawful worship of God, in spite of the absence of God's command. Since the cause of these works is outside of God's command, they depart from true worship resulting in offence and injury to the church and our neighbor.

Works of this nature are disqualified as good works because they violate the first two conditions that are absolutely necessary to constitute an action that is good in the sight of God.

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c) Those works which are good in themselves and which are commanded by God, but are not performed lawfully, become sins by accident and are not good works.

These works are designed as good works but they are not being performed in the manner nor with the design which God requires. They do not proceed from a true faith and are not done with the objective that God should be glorified thereby.

Works of this nature are disqualified as good works because they violate the first two conditions that are absolutely necessary to constitute an action that is good in the sight of God.

2. The difference between the works of believers and those of the unbelievers.

The works of the believers are done according to the conditions which we have specified, while those of the unbelievers, even though God may have commanded them, do not proceed from faith and are not joined with internal obedience. They are done without sincerity and are, therefore, works of hypocrisy. Since they do not occur as a result of the only cause from which they are able to occur, which is faith, they cannot be directed to the glory of God, which is the chief end to which all our actions ought to be directed. The actions of the unbeliever cannot, therefore, be called good works.

3. In what respect the moral works of the ungodly are sins.

The difference which exists between the works of the believer and the unbeliever proves that the moral works of the unbeliever are sins, but yet not sins similar to those works which are in their own nature opposed to the law of God. Works that are opposed to God's law are sins in themselves according to their very own nature while the moral works of the unbelievers are sins merely by accident. Their moral good works, which may shame some believers in their moral character, are subject to a fatal defect, which is that they are not performed for the glory of God but for the glory and praise of the individual. This fatal defect has its root in one, singular cause, which is an absence of faith in God, which disqualifies their works as good works, even though the effect of their works may benefit the general society and create a general peaceful atmosphere for the church.

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Gen 45:5 - 8 Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup>For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. <sup>7</sup>God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup>Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

We should, therefore, not say that the good works of the heathen and the unbelievers are sins and should because of this be avoided and condemned.

This is not a legitimate conclusion because it is only the defects, which attach themselves to these works that are to be avoided and guarded against, as we shall show when we study the doctrine of sin.

Eph 2:8 - 10 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

The graphical illustration on the next page gives an overview of what we have said here.

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## A Table of Good Works

