

## A study of Jesus Christ

Last week studied the question "What are good works" and saw a table that graphically illustrated the etymology of good works. This week we are looking at the second question, How may good works be performed?

### II. How may good works be performed?

On the face of it, it appears as if this question is self-evident. But it is necessary that we carefully look into this question so that we determine what the effect of the good works of the unbelievers mean; and those who imagine that the unbelievers may perform works of free-will that prepares them for salvation.

Good works are possible only by the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit, and they are only good when the believers, whose hearts have been truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit, perform them. And the believers' hearts are only truly regenerated through the preaching of the gospel, the lawful celebration of the sacraments and the subjection to the church's discipline. This is true not only in their first conversion but also by the perpetual and constant influence and direction of the Holy Spirit, who works in them a knowledge and awareness of sin, their only redemption through faith and a new obedience to the gospel.

The Holy Spirit increases and confirms more and more his gifts in them until they enter the life hereafter in glory.

It is not possible to render obedience to the law, which includes good works, without the grace of the Holy Spirit. Without the grace and continual direction of the Holy Spirit, even the most holy persons on earth can do nothing but sin, as is evident from the examples of David, Peter, and others. Without regeneration, no part of any work that is good in the sight of God, can ever be begun, inasmuch as we are all by nature evil and dead in sin.

Mat 7:11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

Eph 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

When Isaiah says in chapter 64:6, "All our righteous acts are as filthy rags" he includes himself with the most holy of men.

## A study of Jesus Christ

Now, if nothing but sin is found before God in the saints, what will He find in those who do not believe? The deeds of the unbelievers are described in Romans 1 and 2 in a very graphic manner.

Other passages also describe the works of the unbeliever and expose them as unacceptable to God:

Matt 7:18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Jer. 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

Matt 7:11 I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Phil 2:13 For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Without the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us, we are altogether unclean and abominable in the sight of God and all our works are offensive to God.

But the righteousness of Christ is not imputed unto us before our conversion as we have shown. It is impossible, therefore, either that we or our works would be pleasing to God before our conversion. Faith is the cause of good works. Faith comes from God. Therefore, good works, which are the fruits of faith, are from God. They cannot be before faith and conversion, or else the effect would be before its cause.

Are there any works that are preparatory to conversion? Some works may be considered preparatory to conversion, such as

1. works of repentance guided by the Holy Spirit in the changing of our hearts,
2. those works that God uses for the purpose of effecting repentance in us, which may be said to be true outward conduct and discipline of the life,
3. those works that are in accordance with the divine law,
4. hearing, reading and meditating upon the word of God,
5. the cross,

## A study of Jesus Christ

6. adverse circumstances, which brings one down from self pride to humbleness before God,
7. other works in the same vein and with the same purpose.

These works cannot be done without the intercession of the Holy Spirit in the first place, but they may occur before conversion.

If, however, they are performed as men's good efforts to entice and convince God to grant true conversion and His other gifts, they cannot be preparatory to conversion because "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom 14:23).

If these works are imperfect of themselves and deserve nothing, can they, on account of their good intent, be considered proper for the mercy of God to grant conversion and eternal life?

No they cannot. God has mercy on whom He will have mercy and not upon those who may deserve mercy.

Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. (Rom 9:19)

No one deserves anything from God, except punishment, and banishment from His presence.

So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' (Luke 17:10)

### III. Are the Works of the Regenerate Perfectly Good?

The works of the saints are not perfectly good or pure in this life,

1. Because even believers do many things that are evil, which are sins in themselves, on account of which they are guilty in the sight of God and deserve to be cast into everlasting punishment.

Thus, Peter denied Christ three times, David committed adultery, murdered Uriah, attempted to conceal his wickedness, numbered the children of Israel, and so on. The law declares that anyone will be cursed that does not uphold the words of the law by carrying them out. (Deut 27:26)

## A study of Jesus Christ

2. Because they omit doing many good things, which they ought to do according to the law.
3. Because the good works, which they perform are not so perfectly good and pure as the law requires, for they are always marred with defects and polluted with sins.

Perfect righteousness, which the law requires is wanting, even in the best works of the saints. The reason for this is easily understood, inasmuch as faith, regeneration, and the love of God and our neighbor, from which good works proceed, continue imperfect in us in this life. Since the cause is imperfect (us), it is impossible that the effects that flow from this cause should be perfect. (Rom 7:23)

This is the reason why the works of the godly cannot stand in the judgment of God. (Ps 143:2; Deut 27:26)

Now that we realize that all our works are imperfect, it becomes us to acknowledge and lament our sinfulness and infirmity and press forward towards perfection with even greater vigor.

It is evident from the foregoing, that to imagine that one's works could account for something with God, over and above what is declared in the law, is blasphemy, and full of impiety, because it would make God a debtor to man, which is not possible.

### IV. How can our good works please God, since they are only imperfectly good?

If our works could never be pleasing to God, they would be performed in vain. There is, however, a manner in which our works could be pleasing to God, a manner that God devised for our sakes. We must, therefore, know in what way it is that they please God.

As we have seen in last week's lesson, works can be judged according to their virtue in and of themselves, or they can be judged by the virtue of the one performing them. If the virtue of the one performing them is defiled and unacceptable, the works in themselves are defiled and imperfect and since they are imperfect in themselves and defiled in many respects, they cannot of themselves please God. God's extreme justice and righteousness do not allow that. However, they are

## A study of Jesus Christ

acceptable to God in Christ the Mediator who imputes on us a righteousness that is acceptable to God, through faith.

We may also say because of the merit and satisfaction of Christ imputed unto us by faith and because of his intercession with the Father on our behalf, our works are acceptable to God. It is the integrity and holiness of His Son that elevates our works to the status of being acceptable.

Neither our works nor our virtue has anything to do with the virtue of our works; it is entirely the work of Christ our Lord.

So, now we know that just as we do not please God in ourselves, but in his Son, so our works, being imperfect and unholy in themselves, are acceptable to God because of the righteousness of Christ.

This righteousness covers all the imperfections and impurities of our works so that they do not appear before God as defiled and imperfect. It is also evident that it is necessary that the person who performs good works should be acceptable to God, because then the works of the person are accepted, otherwise, when the person is without faith, the best works are but an abomination before God, since they are all hypocritical.

If the person is acceptable to God, so are the works. But the person is acceptable to God on account of the Mediator, that is, by imputation of the merit and righteousness of Christ with which the person is covered as with a garment in the presence of God. Hence, the works of the person are also pleasing to God, for the sake of the Mediator.

God does not look upon and examine our righteousness and imperfect works as they are in themselves, according to the rigor of His law in respect to which He would rather condemn them, but He beholds and considers them in his Son. It is for this reason that God is said to have had respect to Abel and his offering, namely, in his Son, in whom Abel believed, for it was by faith that he presented his sacrifice.

**Heb 11:4** By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. (Gen 4:4).

## A study of Jesus Christ

But, our works, our prayers, are not merely performed without a process or a procedure. In the Old Testament the priests offered to God in the temple and in Christ, too, our works and prayers are offered to God according to an order and a discipline. Nothing is proclaimed in the New Testament that is not founded in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.

Luk 24:44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

So, instead of human priests (or ourselves) offering our works to God, it is Christ, the Son of God, our High Priest who offers our works to God. Only He has the dignity, integrity and credentials to appear before the throne of God and take our measly works and our imperfect prayers and let them go up before God.

Rev 8:4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

But Christ is also called our altar, on which our prayers and works are being placed because it is the only altar of sufficient dignity on which our works and prayers may be placed to achieve the desired result: that they become pleasing to God. Otherwise, they will be detestable in His sight. It is inescapable that faith in Christ should precede our works for them to be considered "good".

It also follows, therefore, that every defect and every imperfection concerning ourselves and our works is covered, and, as it were, repaired by Christ's sacrifice and merit so that they are as if they were performed by perfectly righteous people.

The believer, knowing this, considers his own efforts as worthless unless they are cleaned and repaired by faith in Christ.

PHI 3:8, 9 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

## A study of Jesus Christ

### V. Why Good Works are to be done or why are they necessary?

We have already studied certain moving causes of good works such as the connection between regeneration and justification, the glory of God, the proof of our faith and election, and so on. Good works are to be performed by 1) for the sake of God, in the first place, 2) for ourselves in the second place, and finally 3) for the sake of our neighbor.

#### 1. Good works are to be done for the sake of God,

- a. That the glory of God our heavenly Father may be manifested. The manifestation of the glory of God is the chief end why God commands and wills that good works should be performed by us, that we may honor Him by our good works and that others seeing them may glorify our Father, which is in heaven. (Matt 5:16).
- b. That we may render unto God the obedience, which He requires, or on account of the command of God. God requires the commencement of obedience in this life, and the perfection of it in the life to come.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

It is God's will that you should be sanctified. (I Thess 4:3)

...offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Rom 6:13, 18)

- c. That we may thus render unto God the gratitude, which we owe Him. It is just and proper that we should love, worship and revere Him who redeemed us, and from whom we have received the greatest benefits, and that we should declare our love and gratitude by our obedience and good works. God deserves our obedience and worship on account of the benefits that He confers upon us.

## A study of Jesus Christ

We do not merit His benefits by anything we do. Hence, our gratitude, which shows itself by our obedience and good works, is due to God for His great benefits.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. (Rom 12:1)

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (I Peter 2:5, 9)