

God Working In Us

Text: So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Belgic Confession article 24: We believe that this true faith, produced in man by the hearing of God's Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a "new man," causing him to live the "new life" and freeing him from the slavery of sin. Therefore, far from making people cold toward living in a pious and holy way, this justifying faith, quite to the contrary, so works within them that apart from it they will never do a thing out of love for God but only out of love for themselves and fear of being condemned. So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls "faith working through love," which leads a man to do of himself the works that God has commanded in his Word. These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by his grace.

Yet they do not count toward our justification—for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works. Otherwise they could not be good, any more than the fruit of a tree could be good if the tree is not good in the first place. So then, we do good works, but not for merit—for what would we merit? Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and not he to us, since it is he who "works in us both to will and do according to his good pleasure"—thus keeping in mind what is written: "When you have done all that is commanded you, then you shall say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have done what it was our duty to do.'"

Yet we do not wish to deny that God rewards good works—but it is by his grace that he crowns his gifts. Moreover, although we do good works we do not base our salvation on them; for we cannot do any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment. And even if we could point to one, memory of a single sin is enough for God to reject that work. So we would always be in doubt, tossed back and forth without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly if they did not rest on the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior.

Intro: Luther & Good Works

I. Legalism

II. "an empty faith"

Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. (John 1:12-13) It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. Oh 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. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works. --Luther

III. Our Text

Paul's aim

Paul's encouragement

Application 1: Legalism

What we say to unbelievers

What we say to believers

Application 2: Good Works

Extreme 1:

Extreme 2:

Application 3: Assurance

The _____ way

The _____ way

The _____ way

1 My crimes awake; and hideous fear
Distracts my restless mind,
Guilt meets my eyes with horrid glare,
And hell pursues behind.

2 Almighty vengeance frowns on high,
And flames array the throne;
While thunder murmurs round the sky
Impatient to be gone.

3 Where shall I hide this noxious head?
Can rocks or mountains save?
Or shall I wrap me in the shade
Of midnight and the grave?

4 Is there no shelter from the eye
Of a revenging God?
Jesus, to thy dear wounds I fly,
Bedew me with thy blood.

5 Those guardian drops my soul secure,
And wash away my sin;
Eternal justice frowns no more,
And conscience smiles within.

6 I bless that wondrous purple stream
That whitens every stain;
Yet is my soul but half redeem'd,
If sin the tyrant reign.

7 Lord, blast his empire with thy breath,
That cursed throne must fall;
Ye flatt'ring plagues, that work my death,
Fly, for I hate you all. --Isaac Watts

Christ, therefore,
justifies no man
without also
sanctifying him.
These blessings are
conjoined by a
perpetual and
inseparable tie.
--Calvin