

eternal counsel: “good works, which God hath before ordained” (10). God determined them; Christ earned them, all of them, on His cross. They are part of our salvation. Our good works are God’s gift through Christ. Wonder of wonders, God determined that we should walk in them! It is all of God!

The complaint is made that this doctrine makes man a robot. How can a work be our work and God’s work? Cannot these deniers of sovereign grace see that God is almighty? He does marvellous things! The *Canons of Dordt* call this work of God as great a wonder as His creation of the universe, for it is “mysterious,” “ineffable,” beyond our understanding (III/IV:12). We, weak and insignificant creatures, cannot fully understand any of God’s works. Can we explain how a baby is formed in the womb of its mother? Comes to birth? Takes his or her place as an adult in God’s world?

Nevertheless, God has revealed a bit to us. Our good works are emphatically *our* good works. So much are they our good works that we are judged in accordance with our works and our good works by grace are even rewarded! How can this be?

When God begins the work of salvation in us at our new birth, He gives us the gift of faith. That faith, as *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord’s Day 7, teaches us, is a living bond that unites us to the risen and exalted Christ so that His heavenly, resurrection life becomes ours. That faith our God brings to consciousness in us by the preaching of the gospel so that faith enables us to do two things. First, it makes us receive as truth everything God has revealed to us in His Word. Second, it causes us to put all our trust and hope for every speck of our salvation in Christ alone. It enables us to lay hold of Him, seek our salvation in Him alone and cling to Him in all our grief. Without Him, we have nothing; with Him, we have everything. It is in this way that we do good works because God works in us in Jesus Christ and by faith in Him.

Our *Heidelberg Catechism* begins with the one question without an answer to which I cannot live: “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” The answer, so simple, so plain, so child-like, so all-encompassing: “That I belong to Jesus. He bought me with His blood!” That is all—even for a child. I need no more than that.

The best illustration is to be found in the horticulturist’s work of grafting. If the branch of a Macintosh apple tree is cut off the tree, it would soon die, for its life comes from the tree. If it is grafted into a Gala apple tree, it will live, because it is grafted into a tree from which it gets its life. Though it be grafted into a Gala apple tree and draws its life from that tree, it will continue to bear Macintosh apples.

So we, grafted into Christ, do bring forth fruit. It is our fruit, no one else’s. Yet all the life in us that produces good works is Christ’s life. Salvation is in God alone, for He it is that must and will receive all the glory, both now and forever. *Prof. Hanko*

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The Law of Christ (2)

We continue with our response to a reader’s question: “I would like to ask your view of the law of Christ (I Cor. 9:20-21). What exactly is the law of Christ and how does it, if at all, differ from the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament?”

God’s writing His law upon our hearts (Jer. 31:33) is possible only because of our Lord’s amazing sacrifice on the cross. If I may put it that way, the deepest depth of Christ’s suffering was when He cried out in utter anguish, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). It was an awful cry of abandonment: “why?” Yet, even then, His cry was, “My God, my God.” That is, even at that terrible moment, Christ was saying, “Even though I know nothing but pure wrath, I still love thee, O My God!” In other words, He kept the law of God, not only in the years of His ministry but even as He experienced hellish agonies. It was perfect obedience. He earned it for us. That is why the law is now written on our hearts. Christ did what we cannot do: keep God’s law. His motto was “I come to do thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:9).

Our *Heidelberg Catechism* speaks of a “must” regarding good works (Q. 86). The “must” arises out of our salvation. We are told that we must do good works *because* we are saved. We are told in the gospel that we *can* do good works as an incentive to do them. We are told in the Word that we *will* do good works. The “must,” the “can” and the “will” all come together in us by God’s work. The broken sinner is so happy to hear that he is justified by faith alone without his works that he, in thankfulness to God, does them through the power of divine grace.

Our good works are God’s working in us. Paul, in Philippians 2:12-13, urges us to work out our own salvation. The reason we are admonished to work out our salvation is because God has made it completely possible, for He, so the text tells us, not only makes us willing to do it but also He Himself works in us the very work He calls us to do.

Ephesians 2:10 is especially clear. Paul has said that salvation is God’s work entirely and never ours. We are saved by grace through faith—and neither grace nor faith are of ourselves but are gifts of God (8). Paul tells us how it is possible for us to do good works, even as those saved by grace through faith without works. We are God’s “workmanship” (10). The word means, God’s *masterpiece*, like the work of the greatest artist on a canvas. We are God’s workmanship because we show forth the skill and glory of the One who changed us from sinners to saints.

But what about our good works? Well, for one thing, He made us what we are so that we could do good works: “we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (10). Even these good works are decreed for us—every one of them—in God’s

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The Crowding Out of the Church

In general, twenty-first century Protestantism suffers from the terrible malaise of a gross ignorance of biblical and Reformed ecclesiology, faulty and false doctrines concerning the church, and a grievous under appreciation of Christ's bride and body. Among the factors that produce and/or reinforce a low and erroneous view of the church is the misunderstanding of other spheres, institutions or parties, including work, oneself, the family and the state, which we shall consider in turn.

First, for some, the church is largely crowded out by work (the sphere of employment). Some are workaholics, labouring very long hours or often away on business trips, so the church gets short shrift in their lives. Some move home or attend university with little or no thought given to the presence or otherwise of a faithful congregation, manifesting the three marks of a true church, in the area (*Belgic Confession* 29). Some are given to "the love of money" which is the root of all sorts of evil (I Tim. 6:10), including slighting the church of which Christ is the head. Some professing believers break the fourth commandment by performing labour that is not a work of necessity or mercy, thereby incurring guilt before God, and depriving themselves of the means of grace and much-needed fellowship with other believers in the instituted church.

Second, there is the problem of unbiblical individualism (the sphere of self). Everything is all about me, my needs, and, hence, what the church can do for me. There is little or nothing about other saints and their needs, and what I can do for them. Little or no thought is given to the church or its head, the Lord Jesus Christ, just me!

Over against this, the *Apostles' Creed* speaks of "the communion of the saints," which is explained in the *Heidelberg Catechism*: "First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are, in common, partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members" (A. 55).

Typically, selfish people do not like being under authority (even where it is properly exercised) or having people over them (even if they are seeking to serve them in Jesus Christ) or being told what to do (even if this is done righteously and humbly) or being held accountable (even if it is to the Lord's church and to Him).

This individualistic attitude has a hard time understanding, practising and living the biblical truth of the church. Such people struggle to submit to, enjoy and rejoice in scriptural ecclesiology. They kick against being part of a body and being under the Good Shepherd's under-shepherds. In so doing, sadly, such people harm others and especially themselves.

Third, some have a wrong view of marriage and the home (the sphere of family). Consider a husband who is overbearing towards his wife and lords it over his household. Absolutely everything in the home has to come under his attention and suit him. Those who abuse their authority in their household will find it very difficult to submit and behave wisely in "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and

ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). If such a man is unemployed, with no boss to submit to or obey, his problem will be exacerbated because he is not used to being under anyone.

Likewise, there are wives for whom it is all about their husbands and children. The real issue is the home and the family. As long as they are okay, who cares about Christ's body? The church is unnecessary or, at best, peripheral; never central.

For such husbands and wives (and their children), it is all about me and my family. The biblical place and significance of the church cannot be properly grasped and enjoyed.

However, the truth is that there should be no conflict: me versus the church or my family versus the church. The proper relationship is that of reciprocity. Believing husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children and individuals need and help the church. The church, in turn, needs and helps Christian husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children and individuals.

Fourth, there is the deification of the state (the sphere of civil government). In the twenty-first century, many states, especially in the West, are acting like God and are being regarded by many as if they were a sort of God. Professing Christians need to be careful lest their hearts and minds are secularized too!

The welfare state promises to give, through our taxes, cradle to grave security, if you can make it to the cradle without having been cruelly murdered in the womb. So who needs the God of providence and the church's diaconate?

The politically-correct state seizes divine prerogatives by redefining person (in order to kill unborn babies), marriage (to promote homosexuality) and gender (to further transgenderism). All of this is contrary to God's Word (Ps. 139:13-16; Matt. 19:4-6; Rom. 1:26-27), as proclaimed by the true churches of Jesus Christ.

The moralizing state redefines love as first tolerance, and then approval and even celebration of sin, especially sexual sin. It then redefines God as the sappy, immoral god of left-wing love. Who then needs the real God of love and the love of God in the cross of Jesus Christ, and the Ten Commandments as the summary of love for God and one's neighbour, as proclaimed by Christ's church?

The deification and absolutizing of the state is reflected in the well-nigh ubiquitous phrase: "the government," as if the civil government is the only government that exists. What about God's sovereign and all-encompassing government or the government of a business or family government or individual government or church government? The state's unwarranted encroachment into the God-given spheres of the home, the church, work, etc., is bad enough but the Christian must not allow such usurpations to take over his own thinking!

Where this soul-deadening, secularising, statist view steals the hearts and minds of professing Christians, they will have low views of the need of the church, the offices of the church, the authority of the church, the work of the church, etc. The leviathan, politically-correct state must not overshadow the believer's vision of, and love for, God's glorious church, the bride of Christ for whom He shed His atoning blood, and whom He sanctifies and cleanses by His Word (Eph. 5:25-27)!
Rev. Stewart