

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #31, Lord's Day 24

The Believer and Good Works



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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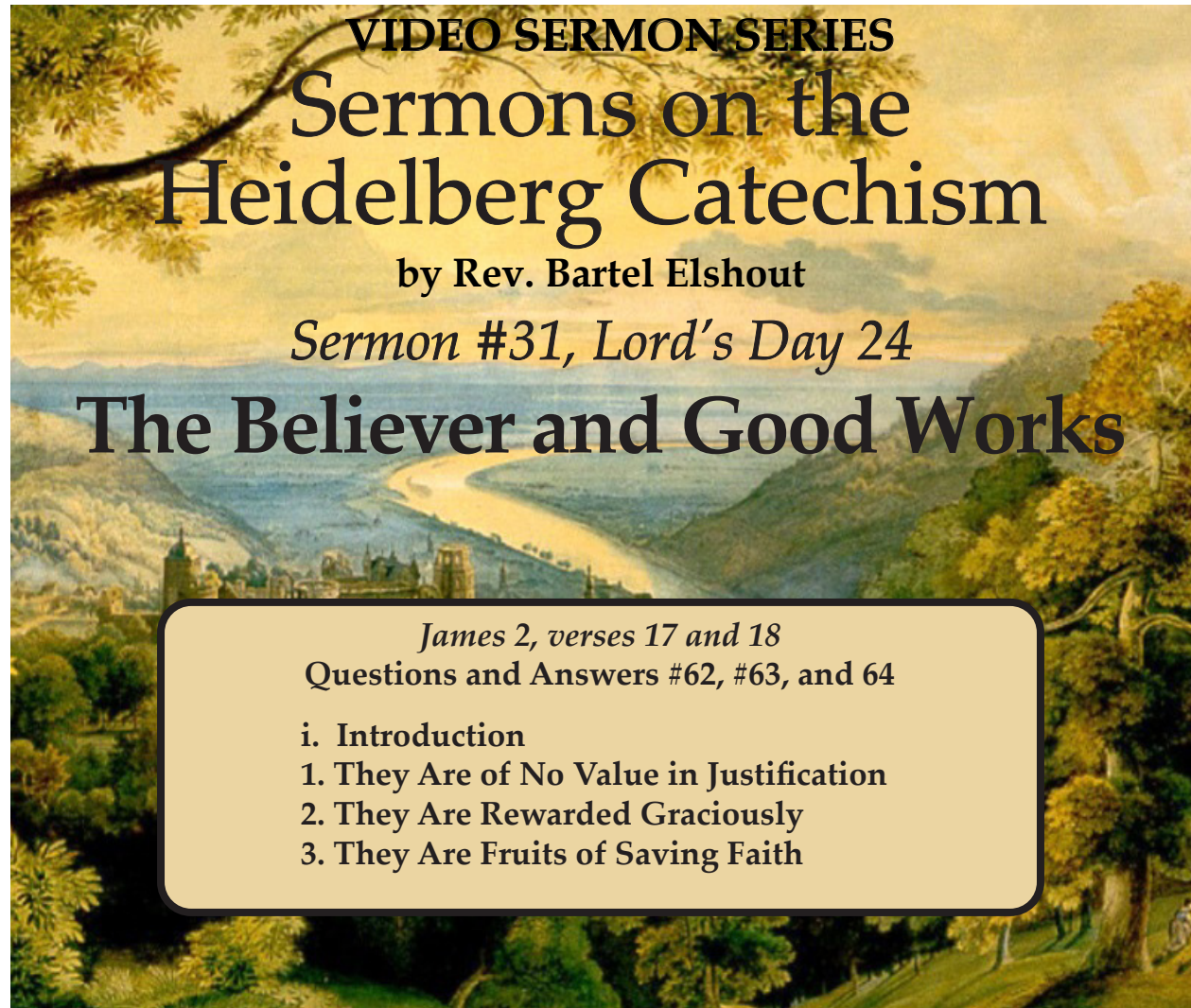
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Sermon #31, Lord's Day 24

The Believer and Good Works

James 2, verses 17 and 18

Questions and Answers #62, #63, and 64

i. Introduction

- 1. They Are of No Value in Justification**
- 2. They Are Rewarded Graciously**
- 3. They Are Fruits of Saving Faith**

Introduction and Review

Beloved congregation, we know that the great Reformer, Martin Luther,¹ could at times, or quite often, express himself in rather radical terms. And he needed to do that in order to awaken the people to the essential and foundational truths of God's Word. One of his statements was, "There is a Pope in the bosom of every Christian." What he meant to say is that we all have a natural inclination towards Roman Catholicism. We all have a natural inclination to be saved by works, to be saved by something that is within us. And as you well know, what an intense struggle Luther went through to discover that we are not justified by the works of the law, but that we are justified by faith only. As you know, it was Romans 1, verse 17 that God used to open his eyes. The scales fell from his eyes when he read, and when the Spirit of God shed light upon this passage, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Luther had tried so hard to be a peace with God. He did everything he knew how, everything he had been taught from childhood, and he could not find peace for his soul, until by divine illumination, it suddenly dawned on him that the righteousness of God, which he so feared,

¹ Martin Luther (1483–1546), was a German priest, theologian, author, hymn writer, professor, and former Augustinian friar, who was the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation in Europe.

that righteousness which he thought only condemned him, when he realized that that righteousness saves those that put their trust in Christ. He realized that when we believe that simple act of trusting in Christ and his finished work, that we become partakers of that righteousness, the righteousness that God requires, the righteousness which we need, and the righteousness which God graciously imputes to the sinner who puts his trust in Christ.

And so, last week, we considered that very foundational Lord's Day, Lord's Day 23, *How art thou righteous before God?* (Question #60). And then, that astonishing, beautiful, and powerful Answer, *That though I have grossly transgressed all of God's commandments, and have kept none of them, and am still inclined towards all evil; notwithstanding, God, purely out of grace, and because of Christ's merits will impute to me, the sinner, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; so that God views me as if I had never committed any sin—* views the believer as righteous, not because of an inherent righteousness, but because of that imputed righteousness.

And that brings us to Lord's Day 24, in which the Heidelberg Catechism wants to reaffirm the teaching of Lord's Day 23, but now, as it were, from a negative perspective, to make sure that we truly understand what justification by faith means. So let's turn to Lord's Day 24 of our Heidelberg Catechism.

Question #62: *But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?*

And the Answer is: *Because that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.*

Question #63: *What! Do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?*

The Answer: *This reward is not of merit, but of grace.*

Question #64: *But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?*

The Answer is: *By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.*

And so, this Lord's Day addresses the essential connection between a *Believer and Good Works*. Three simple points. First of all, *Our Good Works Are of No Value in Justification*. In other words, by our works, we cannot merit the favor of God. Secondly, nevertheless, *They Are Rewarded Graciously*. And so, correctly, the Catechism addresses the fact that God does promise his reward, his blessing upon those who walk in his ways. However, that reward is a gracious reward, not a meritorious reward. And thirdly, that those *Good Works Are the Fruit of Saving Faith*. In other words, as we will see, the true believer cannot but do good works. That is an essential fruit of a true saving faith. So, *The Believer and Good Works; They Are of No Value in Justification; They Are Rewarded Graciously; and They Are the Fruits of Saving Faith*.

1. They Are of No Value in Justification

And congregation, this Question is such an important one: *Why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?* And this question needs to be asked, because ultimately, all errors regarding the gospel are related to this very question. Because we are all inclined by nature, it's so deeply engrained in us, that we want to earn God's favor by who we are and by what we do. And it's ultimately the mark of every false religion in the world, is that, in every false religion, it is your doing, your work, your merit that somehow has to secure the favor of God. And the biblical gospel, the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone excludes all

human merit; it excludes all human work.

And this error began to already manifest itself during the time of the apostles. That's what moved the Apostle Paul to write this letter to the Galatians, a letter, by the way, which was Martin Luther's favorite epistle of the New Testament. So what does Paul write to the Galatians? He says, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Galatians 3:1). And so, what the Apostle Paul observed among the Galatians—they dwelled in Asia Minor—they were drifting away from the gospel; they were drifting away from justification by faith alone, and most likely through the influence of the Judaizers, those teachers, those Jewish teachers, who tried to reintroduce this whole idea of salvation by works.

That's, by the way, why the Pharisees ultimately so intensely hated the Lord Jesus Christ, because, by his ministry, he exposed them for what they truly were. They were the ultimate proponents of salvation by works. They boasted of their accomplishments. They had the audacity in God's presence to pat themselves on the shoulder for all that they did. And then Jesus came along, and he said, "[Unless] your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no [wise] enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). And so, the point Jesus made, that that righteousness—as impressive as it may seem to you, as impressive as it was to the Pharisees and scribes—that righteousness is null and void in God's sight; is of no value. With that righteousness, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. You need a righteousness that is acceptable to God alone. And so, throughout history, there is this tendency towards what we call, with a formal term, *synergism*, as if salvation is somehow a cooperative venture between God and us. And so, Roman Catholicism did not deny the necessity of grace, for then they would have to deny Christ and the fact that he suffered and died. But they taught, and teach until this day, that our works, our performances, also contribute to salvation.

And ultimately, congregation, this question expresses the difficulty that we all have with the gospel of justification by faith alone. Ultimately for the true believer, it remains a lifelong lesson. We have to be taught over and over again that we are justified by faith alone. Also, God's children, also true believers, we have that wretched tendency until our dying day that somehow we think that there is something in us by which we need to secure the favor of God. And that especially happens when we sin. We are so inclined, when we sin, when we fail, we are so inclined to become legalists. We're so inclined, when we sin, to think that somehow we have to regain God's favor, that somehow we have to do penance to make things right again. No, we need to be taught again that there will never be anything in us. That's why I said last week already, that's why Calvin² was so correct when he said, "Faith is a humbling grace." In other words, faith is exercised by someone for the first time, or by renewal over and over again, faith is always exercised in the deep awareness that I am nothing, that I am bankrupt before God. And God, in his Fatherly wisdom, will allow us to stumble, to again bring us back to where we ought to be, to again drive us out to the cross alone, to again compel us to look to Christ alone.

That's why, in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 3, Paul writes, he said, "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ"—the simplicity that is in Christ. Because ultimately, the gospel is profoundly simple, so simple that over and over again, Abraham's conversion is expressed in this simple statement: "[He] believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3)—

² John Calvin, or, Jean Calvin, (1509–1564), was a well-known French theologian, pastor, writer, and well-known Reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, after whom many Reformers patterned their teachings.

that's Abraham's conversion story—he, who is the father of the faithful. And congregation, that is the heart of all true Christian experience. Abraham believed God, he believed the promise of the gospel, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Because Abraham, too, had no righteousness of his own. The Apostle makes that abundantly clear in Romans 4. And so, Abraham, as the father of the faithful, was a man who lived by faith, who was justified by faith.

That's why the biblical gospel—I've said this before, and I will explain it again to you—the biblical gospel is counterintuitive. What does that fancy word mean? It means that it goes directly contrary to our way of thinking. Salvation by works is intuitive. We are intuitively inclined to a salvation by works. We are intuitively inclined to want to believe that there is something in us that makes us acceptable in the sight of God. That's our intuition, our natural intuition. And so, the gospel is counterintuitive. It runs directly contrary to it. And that's why we need to hear it over and over again. That's why we, as the servants of God, have to drive home that truth over and over again that justification is by faith alone, and excludes all human merit, excludes all human righteousness.

Because, the Catechism goes on to say, *Because that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law.* The Catechism has already addressed this at an earlier Day, but it's very important to realize that again. In other words, why is salvation by works an impossibility? Why can we not be reconciled with God by our own doings? Because God is a perfect God, perfectly holy, perfectly just, and he demands absolute and flawless perfection. The righteousness that satisfies him, the righteousness that pleases him has to be absolutely flawless, *and in all respects conformable to the divine law.* James writes this: “For whosoever shall keep the whole law,” in James 2, verse 10, “and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all.” So, in other words, God's law is such a comprehensive whole, it is so completely combined, James says, if you transgress one commandment, you have transgressed them all. And who would dare to say that we are living a life that is in perfect conformity to the law?

That's why Galatians 3, verse 10, Paul says, “Cursed is every one”—he's quoting the Old Testament—“that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things. And that's why, you see, that's the whole point here. That's why, to think that we can somehow satisfy God is utter foolishness. That's why we need to be taught by the Holy Spirit. That's why we need to be stripped of all of our own righteousness. We need to be confronted with our bankruptcy, so that we will cease from our own works, and look to Christ alone, and put our trust in Christ alone. For only then can we be approved before the tribunal of God.

That's a powerful statement, congregation, because that's ultimately where you and I will have to appear. We will once be summoned before the tribunal of God. And when we appear before the tribunal, God will judge us by whether we have that righteousness that he requires. And woe unto us if we appear there without that righteousness. Oh, woe unto us, because then we will realize that we cannot stand before the tribunal of God. And you see, that becomes an experiential reality in the lives of God's children. For God's children, this is not just something they profess, this becomes real. This is expressed so beautifully, as you know, in Psalm 130, when the psalmist says, Lord, if thou shouldest mark iniquity, who can stand? (verse 3). The psalmist realized that he had no standing before God. He realized he was undone. And it's very unsettling, congregation. That isn't just some doctrinal truth he confessed. That becomes real, that becomes experientially real in the lives of God's children. And why? Because God has one goal in dealing with us in this way. He

summons us, as it were, experientially, he summons us before the tribunal, in order to bring us to the cross; in order to bring us to Christ. That's his goal.

That's why the cross is such an offense to the natural man. That's why the cross, the gospel of the cross, is an abomination to the Pharisee, an abomination to a religious person. Because, very simply, boys and girls, and you can remember this, what the cross does is, it puts a cross through all of our works. The cross puts a cross through all of our righteousness. The cross teaches that all of our works and all of our righteousness are of no value in the sight of God. And only when that becomes experientially real, only when we learn to say "amen" to that; only then will that cross be precious to us; only then will Christ become precious; only then will we realize that it is in him, and in him alone that we can be righteous before God. That's why Luther had to struggle for such a long time, because God was going to use Luther to resurrect the gospel of justification by faith alone, and he spent his entire life hammering home that foundational truth. And it's been rightly called, it's *the hinge on which the entire gospel turns*.

And also, it says here in the Catechism, *that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin*. Isaiah 64, verse 6, we are very familiar with those words, but they are so fitting here: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." All our righteousnesses, all our very best works, all come short of the glory of God. Luke 16, verse 15, Christ says this: "God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Think about that. That which we highly esteem is an abomination in his sight. Why? Because a perfectly holy, and righteous, and just God can only be pleased with that which is in perfect conformity to his character and to his law. And anything that deviates from that is an abomination to him. And so, we may esteem something very highly, but God views it from his perspective, and it is an abomination in his sight. And that's why justification by faith alone is the only option for guilty sinners.

That's why Paul writes in Romans 4, verse 5, where he talks about Abraham and David, and he says this, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Counted for righteousness—so, let me, again, be clear. That came out last week too. Paul is not saying that there is any worthiness in our faith. Because if that were true, we would still be saved by works. There is no worthiness in our faith. But it is a divinely appointed means by which we become partakers of that righteousness which is in Christ. Faith is the empty hand—the empty hand of a beggar. And so, boys and girls, if you have a very wealthy person with a lot of money wants to give something to a beggar, a poor, homeless person. He will go to that person, and he will offer his gift to that person. He will say, "My dear friend, I want to help you. I have a gift for you." But you see, the homeless person cannot benefit from that gift until he opens his hands to receive that gift. Only then does he then reap the benefit of that gift. That's what faith is. Faith is opening up empty beggars' hands to receive what God so freely offers in his only begotten Son. And so, there is no merit in that act. It is the means, the divinely-appointed means whereby we become partakers, because otherwise, we would still be saved by works. And so, in Titus 3, verse 5, Paul writes, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."

Oh, congregation, do you understand this in some measure? Do you understand this experientially? Has God's Spirit stripped you of your own righteousness? Has God's Spirit confronted you with the fact that even your very best works are defiled with sin? Have you experientially come to the place where you recognize your utter bankruptcy before God? Do you know experientially what that means to look outside of yourself, and to rest with your guilty soul

alone upon Christ and him crucified, as the sole foundation of your hope? That's why the word "sola" was so important for the Reformation. Scripture alone; grace alone; faith alone; Christ alone.³ And the Holy Spirit works ceaselessly in the lives of believers to teach us that lesson again and again, because, as I said, it's so counterintuitive. We are so inclined to drift away from the essential truth, we need to be redirected to it time, and time again.

2. They Are Rewarded Graciously

But then, the Question comes, *What!*—exclamation mark, almost like an angry exclamation. *What! Do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?* Does the Bible not speak about God rewarding the obedience of his people? And so, in that Question, you see, the authors of the Catechism, they are anticipating the pushback, especially in their context, just coming out of Roman Catholicism, in which a system where those works are so important. And ultimately, it expresses the hostility of the human heart toward justification by faith alone.

And that's powerfully illustrated, is it not, in the history of Naaman. Naaman, who came all of the way to Israel to be healed. And he came there in all of his glory, with all of his pomp, on his chariot, with all of his servants, and he comes to the house of Elisha. And he expected to be treated as a general. And Elisha only sends his servant, and he said, "Go to the Jordan, and wash yourself seven times, and you will be healed." And then we read this, "But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought"—see, I thought; I thought; human thinking—"He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage" (2 Kings 5:11–12). See, that the hostility of the human heart to a gospel that excludes all human merit. That's the gospel of the cross, it puts a cross through all human merit.

And yet, God does reward. He does reward the obedience of his people. For instance, we read, in Psalm 19, verse 11: "In keeping of them"—in keeping of God's commandments—"there is great reward." Hebrews 11, verse 6: "He is a rewarder of them that diligently see him." And the Answer is so simple in the Catechism. Yes, we do not deny that God promises reward on obedience, but it says it is not a meritorious reward, it is a gracious reward. And so, it is a reward that is based on the perfect merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has merited that as well. And so, the obedience of the Christian ultimately flows out of Christ. And God views the obedience, the imperfect, flawed obedience of his children, he views them in the righteousness of Christ.

That's why the *active obedience* of Christ should be as precious to the believer as his *passive obedience*. And by his passive obedience, we mean his suffering obedience he accomplished on the cross. His active obedience, where he—on your behalf, dear believer—on your behalf, he perfectly and flawlessly obeyed God's law. And God views his people always in Christ. And so, though our obedience is so imperfect, and we have but a small beginning, yet God views your life always through the lens of the finished work of his Son. And so, for Christ's sake, he blesses his people. For Christ's sake, he rewards them.

And yet, that reward is important. Because what does God want to teach his people? You see, that reward is a manifestation of his Fatherly favor. As the heavenly Father of those that have put their trust in Christ, God wants to teach his children to live obediently. And so, when we do obey,

³ The Five Solas of the Reformation, in Latin, *SOLA GRATIA, SOLA FIDE, SOLUS CHRISTUS, SOLA SCRIPTURA, SOLI DEO GLORIA*—interpreted as, salvation is by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the Glory of God alone.

when we walk in his ways, he will manifest his favor towards us. He wants to teach his children the blessedness of obedience, because we are saved unto obedience. And so, justification is without works. But that's the point of this whole Lord's Day. It does not mean that there are no good works in the life of the believer. Because, as we'll see in a moment, saving faith always produces an obedient life. And then, by the grace of God, we begin to walk in his ways. God will bless it, not because of the perfection of our obedience, but because of the perfection of Christ.

And so, Caleb was a man like that, right? What did God say about Caleb? "But my servant Caleb," he says, "because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Numbers 14:24). Ah, that's interesting. What a beautiful description of saving grace. Oh, as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, slowly but surely, the Christian becomes someone who follows Christ fully, who follows him consistently. Oh, the whole work of the Holy Spirit is so that the life of the Christian habitually becomes oriented towards Christ; habitually becomes oriented towards being doers of his Father's will. That's the whole point Jesus makes in Matthew 7, verse 21: "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord..."—not everyone who claims to be a believer—"but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Christ is saying, "My true followers, my true people, will be doers of my Father's will." Their whole inclination will be towards that. Psalm 119 is one glorious doxology to all of that. And so, Psalm 119 begins this way: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart" (verses 1–2).

And so, why is God so pleased with the increased godliness of his children, even though we remain so painfully aware of the imperfection of it? Why does that so please him? Ah, you see, the more Christ-like we become, the more the Father is pleased, because the Father loves his Son. And he delights in his children because he sees in them the reflection of his Son. We were chosen in the Son to become like the Son. And so, the obedience of the Christian is a growing likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why the Father delights in it. Again, I've said it before—because, dear believer, he always views you in Christ, always. Even when you lose sight of him, he always views you in Christ. And when, by his grace, your focus is on Christ; and when by grace, you abide in Christ; and when by grace, you follow Christ; and when you honor Christ, the Father is so pleased, and he will graciously reward you. You will experience his favor in your soul. And that's why, when you backslide, when play fast and loose with his Word, when you give in to temptation, there comes darkness in your soul, and your Father will hide his face from you. Why?—to cure you of the disobedience. The Father is jealous of the honor of his Son. And so, when you sin, you bring dishonor upon his Son, and that grieves him; that grieves the Spirit of Christ who dwells in you, whose work it is to glorify Christ. And so, God will hide his face from you. Why?—to bring you back to the pathway of obedience, to cure you of your backsliding.

And so, this reward is not of merit, but of grace. Turn with me to Mark 10, where Jesus powerfully illustrates that, Mark 10, verses 29 and 30. And there, we read God's Word: "And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." And congregation, throughout the ages, God's people can testify to this. They can testify to this, that God bestows his favor on his people, not for anything in us. And so, when by grace we do obey him, when by grace

we do honor his Word, God rewards that because of Christ, because he views us in Christ.

3. They Are Fruits of Saving Faith.

And finally, *Doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?* For that was the accusation that Roman Catholicism leveled against the Reformation, that if you teach that, that works are of no value, it will make people careless and profane. And sadly, there are those who dishonor Christ, who profess his name, who say, “Lord, Lord,” but who are not doers of the Father’s will. We call them antinomians—anti *nómos*: that means “against the law” (Greek). And there are many, also in North America, many antinomian Christians, who are not real Christians; antinomians who boast of the name of Christ, and who live a worldly and ungodly life, who fully indulge in all of the pleasures of the flesh, and yet profess the name of Christ. That’s an abomination. That’s antinomianism.

That’s why it says, *By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.* See, even Paul was accused of this, even in his day. There were those who accused him; the Judaizers accused him of this. They said, “Your teaching, the gospel you preach, will produce carelessness.” In Romans 3, verse 8, it says, “As we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.” There, Paul condemns antinomianism. And at the end of the chapter, in which he so beautifully, in chapter 3, unfolds the doctrine of justification by faith, he says, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (verse 31).

It is impossible—the Catechism says—that *those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.* And why is this? Because, congregation, true faith, saving faith, unites us to Christ, and that union is a living union. That union is real. When we are united to him by faith, the Spirit that dwells in Christ, dwells in us. And that union will always be fruitful. That union will manifest itself in a growing Christ-likeness. It’s impossible to be united to him and not, by grace, to become like him. Those two belong inseparably together. And to put it a different way, you cannot claim—listen carefully—you cannot claim to love the living Word, if you do not honor his written Word. Try to remember that. Those who love the living Word, who are united to the living Word, will honor the written Word. Those two belong inseparably together. And where that’s lacking, that means there’s no union. That’s why, in John 15, Christ addresses the fruitless branches—branches that outwardly are united to the vine, but they are fruitless. It’s not a living connection, it’s an outward connection. There’s no life. That’s why the branches are fruitless. You will be cut off, you will be cast into the fire.

And so, the true believer is motivated by love, to bring forth fruits of thankfulness. Take your Bibles and turn with me to Titus 2, an important verse. Titus 2, verses 13 and 14. Paul writes here, and he writes about the “great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”—in verse 14—“who gave himself for us”—and here it comes—“that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” There, you have it—zealous. That becomes the desire. That’s what’s so impressive about Psalm 119. That entire Psalm, 176 verses, you hear the groaning of that godly man, his desire to walk in God’s ways—his desire for grace. Because you cannot love Christ and not honor him. You can’t call him “Lord, Lord,” and not being a doer of his will.

That’s why, in John 8, verse 31, Jesus says to the Jews which believed on him, “If you continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” Did you hear that? “If you continue in my word”—if

you abide in my Word—“then are ye my disciples indeed.” And the true Christian understands that inseparable connection between professing Christ and living a Christ-like life. That’s why, when the Christian falls in sin, when he, to his utter dismay, discovers that he has thought something, or said something, or done something that completely contradicts his profession, it is so unsettling. Then the question arises, “Shall I yet prove to be a hypocrite after all?” And the devil will pounce on us, and he will say, “You said that?” “You thought that?” “You did that? And you claim to be a Christian?” That’s unsettling. It’s unsettling, because the true Christian fears the sin of hypocrisy. Why? Because the true Christian has been made upright within. The true Christian understands this connection. He understands that as certainly as the Son must shine, because it is the Son that so a Christian who is united to Christ must manifest in his life; that that union is real; that there is an experiential union between them.

That’s why we read from James 2, verses 18, 21, and 24. Let me just read this again. We read the whole portion. If you open your Bible, you can follow me, in James 2: “Yea, a man may say,” James says, “Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works... Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?... Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” That’s why originally Luther rejected the epistle of James. He called it an “epistle of straw,” because he thought that James was teaching the exact opposite of Paul. But later, he understood, What James is simply saying is, *You can’t claim your faith to be real unless your works show it.* And so, why does he use Abraham? How did Abraham demonstrate that his faith was real? It was so real, that he was willing to sacrifice his only son (Genesis 22). That’s how much he loved God. And so, that action alone demonstrated that his faith was real. And, of course, James mentions Rahab the harlot, how did she demonstrate that her faith was real?—by the fact that she hid the spies (Joshua 2:1–8). By your works, you see—and of course, we will deal with this in subsequent Lord’s Days.

And so then really, what this Lord’s Day is teaching is *the connection between justification and sanctification.* They are inseparable; two sides of one coin. In other words, through justification, our relationship with God is restored through the righteousness of Christ. But the fruit of that restored relationship is a restored life, is a sanctified life. That’s why it’s been said, and it sounds difficult, but I will repeat it twice. That’s why—that’s the point that’s being made here—sanctification—listen carefully—sanctification is the justification of your justification. *Sanctification is the justification of your justification.* To put it very simply, a sanctified life, a Christ-like life, a Christ-honoring life affirms that our relationship with Christ is real. And so, even though we are justified by faith alone, justifying faith is never alone. It produces fruit. And again, Psalm 130, “If thou...shouldest mark iniquities...who shall stand? But with thee there is forgiveness” in order “that thou mayest be feared” (verses 3–4). So you see, that inseparable connection.

So God forbid that our life contradicts what we profess. Again, Titus 1, verse 16, Titus writes, “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.” Oh dear believer, is there anything in your life right now, whereby you deny your profession? Is there anything in your life right now, any issue, any sin that’s not dealt with, that contradicts what you profess to be? Oh, that you would search your soul, because you so dishonor your Savior. And if you love your Savior, that ought to grieve you. That’s why Jesus said, “If ye love me, [you will] keep my commandments” (John 14:15). If you love me, you will honor my Word. I’ll say it again. You cannot claim to love the living Word if you don’t love his written Word. You can’t claim to honor the living Word, unless you honor his written

Word. Those two belong inseparably together.

So, congregation, who are you? Who are you? Are you a child of God? Are you a true believer in Christ? Have you learned to look to him? Have you learned that you are void of all righteousness? Have you learned that your only hope is in this crucified and risen Christ? Have you taken refuge to him? And does your life affirm that that relationship is real, that you are a living branch of the vine? Lest, on the day of judgment, God will say to many, Christ will say to many who will come before him, saying, “Have we not prophesied in thy name?” “Have we not done wonderful works in thy name?” “Have we not cast out devils in thy name?” Very engaged, and he will say, “I never knew you.” There was never a real relationship with me. “Depart from me,” what does he say?—“Depart from me,” ye workers of iniquity (Matthew 7:21–23). So in spite of all of their religious accomplishments; they did it all in his name, all in his name—he said, “You are a worker of iniquity apart from me. I never knew you.” So let us examine ourselves, in the light of this Lord’s Day as well, whether we are in *the* faith—the faith that produces a godly and Christ-like life. Amen.

Let’s Pray

Our faithful God and Father, we give thee thanks for thy precious Word, so important, so heart-searching. Oh, God, that we would pray and utter the prayer of David, “Search me, O God, search my heart and see if there be any wicked way within me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” And so, may our lives demonstrate that we truly love thy Son, and that therefore, it is our desire to honor thy Son by honoring his Word. Forgive us all the ways in which we fail, all the ways in which we bring dishonor on his name, all the ways in which we grieve his Spirit. May we repent of it, and may we abide in him, for then he will abide in us, and we shall bear much fruit. Go with us this coming week. Bless us in the labor of our hands. Bless our children in school. Bless those who are vacationing, and we pray for our families who are absent today, that thou wouldst bring them again to us this week. Make all things well, and look upon us in and through this Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.