

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #40, Lord's Day 32

The Good Works of the Christian



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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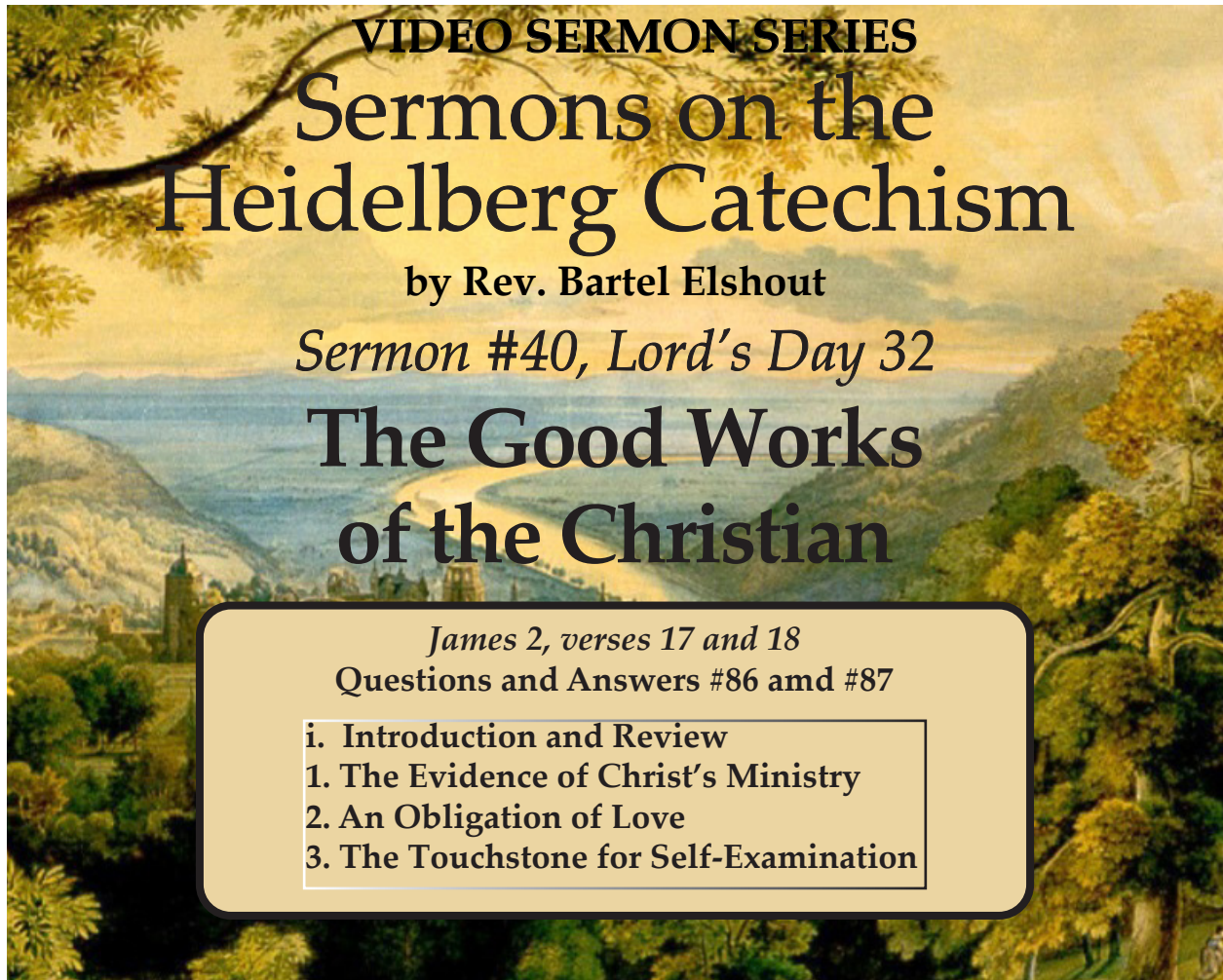
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**The Good Works
of the Christian**

James 2, verses 17 and 18

Questions and Answers #86 and #87

i. Introduction and Review

- 1. The Evidence of Christ's Ministry**
- 2. An Obligation of Love**
- 3. The Touchstone for Self-Examination**

Introduction and Review

Congregation, boys and girls, many weeks ago, when we began to consider the Heidelberg Catechism, we dealt with this foundational question, we've often referred to it: *How many things do I have to know in order that I might live and die in comfort?—Three:...how great my sins and miseries are...how I may be delivered from that misery...and how I must show my gratitude for that deliverance (Question and Answer #2).* And in that simple answer, the authors of the Catechism have given us the foundational pattern, the foundational framework of Christian experience.

So, if you were to ask me, "Which of those three is the most important one—misery, deliverance, gratitude?" I would argue that the last one is the most important one. Because the ultimate goal of the work of redemption, the ultimate goal of the saving work of Christ is to bring forth the fruits of a new life. In other words, Christ saved us, save his people, not just from something, but for something. And interestingly, this section that we are now beginning, in Lord's Day 32, is entitled "Gratitude". That's a very appropriate word, because, if the Christian, if God's children, when they reflect on what it means to have been redeemed by Christ, what that means to have become a partaker of what he has accomplished, then our hearts should overflow with gratitude.

And so, boys and girls, for your benefit tonight, I want to read a very interesting story that illustrates this pattern of misery, deliverance, and gratitude; and In, the obligation of the Christian

to live a life that demonstrates that gratitude for such a deliverance. Some of you may have heard this story before, but if so, it bears repeating. The title of the story is, “Eddie Rickenbacker and the Seagulls.” Listen carefully, boys and girls, this is quite a story.

“It is gratitude that prompted an old man to visit an old broken pier on the eastern sea coast of Florida. Every Friday night, until his death in 1973, he would return, walking slowly and slightly stooped, with a larch bucket of shrimp. The seagulls would flock to this old man, and he would feed them from his bucket. Many years before, in October 1942, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was on a mission in a B17 to deliver an important message to General Douglas MacArthur in New Guinea. But there was an unexpected detour which would hurl Captain Eddie into the most harrowing adventure of his life. Somewhere over the South Pacific, the flying fortress became lost beyond the reach of radio. Fuel ran dangerously low, so the men ditched their plane in the ocean. For nearly a month, Captain Eddie and his companions would fight the water and the weather, and the scorching sun. They spent many sleepless nights recoiling as giant sharks rammed their rafts. The largest raft was nine by five, the biggest shark ten feet long. But of all their enemies at sea, one proved most formidable—starvation. Eight days out, their rations were long gone, or destroyed by the salt water. It would take a miracle to sustain them, and a miracle occurred.

“In Captain Eddie’s own words, ‘Cherry’—that was the B17 pilot, Captain William Cherry—‘read the service that afternoon, and we finished with a prayer for deliverance, and a hymn of praise. There was some talk, but it tapered off in the oppressive heat. With my hat pulled down over my eyes to keep out some of the glare, I dozed off.’ [Now, this is still Captain Rickenbacker talking.] ‘Something landed on my head. I knew that it was a seagull. I don’t know how I knew, I just knew. Everyone else knew too. No one said a word. But peering out from under my hat brim, without moving my head, I could see the expression on their faces. They were staring at that gull. The gull meant food, if I could catch it.’

“And the rest, as they say, is history. Captain Eddie caught the gull, its flesh was eaten. Its intestines were used as bait to catch fish. The survivors were sustained and their hopes renewed, because a lone seagull, uncharacteristically, hundreds of miles from land, offered itself as a sacrifice. You know that Captain Eddie made it, and now you also know that he never forgot. Because every Friday evening about sunset, on a lonely stretch along the eastern Florida seacoast, you could see an old man walking, white hair, bushy-browed, slightly bent, his bucket filled with shrimp was to feed the gulls to remember that one which, on a long day past, gave itself without a struggle, like manna in the wilderness.”

So, boys and girls, in other words, Captain Eddie never forgot that the death of that seagull meant life for him; that the reason he was living is because God miraculously directed that lone seagull to come to them at a dire moment when they were about to perish. And as a result of the death of that seagull, they lived. And that’s why, the rest of his life, he showed his gratitude every Friday by feeding the seagulls, because he wanted never to forget why it was that he was still alive.

And this pales in comparison, congregation, this pales in comparison to the gratitude that God’s people owe their Savior, who came in the fulness of time, to give himself freely and voluntarily, as a sacrifice for sin, so that sinners like you and I, doomed to perish, that we might live because he died, and he gave himself as a ransom for many.

And thus, the title of the third section of the Heidelberg Catechism is a very appropriate one, because the life of the Christian ought to be a life of gratitude. Every day, as Christians, we ought to reflect on who Christ is, and what Christ has done, in order that we might be motivated to show our gratitude to that Savior by living a life devoted to him.

So let’s turn to Lord’s Day 32 of our Heidelberg Catechism.

Question #86: *Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?*

The Answer is: *Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof; and that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ.*

Question #87: *Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?*

The Answer is: *By no means; for the Holy Scripture declares that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

And so, we will focus on *The Good Works of the Christian*. First of all, as *Evidence of Christ's Ministry*, because the Answer very clearly says that the Christ, who has redeemed and delivered his people, by his Spirit, also conforms, those who he has redeemed, he conforms them to his image. So *The Evidence of Christ's Ministry*. Secondly, as an *Obligation of Love*. That's what we tried to illustrate by means of the story; *An Obligation of Love*, that *by our whole conduct*, the Catechism says, we may show our gratitude for his blessings, so that he may be praised by us. And thirdly, as *A Touchstone for Self-Examination*, for if those good works, and what is meant by "good works," of course, is a God-honoring life, a life of obedience to God's revealed will. If that's lacking, in spite of what we profess, if our life testifies to the very opposite, then we have to realize that such, as long as they continue—that's the key word, as we will see—as long as they continue in their sin, will perish, and will not be saved. In other words, the point of Question #87 is, it's impossible to be a Christian and that not be evident in your life. So, *The Good Works of the Christian; The Evidence of Christ's Ministry; An Obligation of Love; and A Touchstone for Self-examination*.

1. The Evidence of Christ's Ministry

And so, Question #86 beautifully summarizes everything that has gone before it—Lord's Day 1 through 31. *Since then*—in light of everything that we have addressed—*Since then we are delivered from our misery*. Now look at the language, *merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours*. And so, they want to be crystal clear here, the authors want to be crystal clear that our redemption excludes all works, in terms of merit. In other words, there is absolutely nothing in our salvation that we have contributed to that salvation. The salvation of God's people is entirely of grace. Remember, grace means that God bestows upon us the exact opposite of what we deserve. So if we are a Christian today, it is grace alone that we are what we are today. That means that God has dealt with you in a manner opposite to what you and I deserve. What we deserve, as sinners, we deserve perdition. We deserve the wrath of God. We deserve to be banished forever from him. And yet, God sovereignly dealt in your life; sovereignly he came, and graciously conquered your heart; graciously made you a new creation. No merit of yours; there was nothing, absolutely nothing in me or you why God would have been moved to do so—pure grace alone, no human merit.

And then, of course, *through Christ*, because it is through Christ that God has been able to bestow upon us the very opposite of what we deserve. Why? Because Christ, in his mediatorial work as our substitute, as our Mediator, he received the opposite of what he deserved. He lived a perfect life. He was the sinless sacrifice without blemish. And yet, in order to save a wretch like us, in order to redeem us, he had to receive what we deserve, the very opposite of what he deserved, so that on the basis of his finished and accomplished work, God could bestow on us the exact opposite

of what we deserve, and so, without any merit of ours.

And of course, in the historical context in which the Heidelberg Catechism was written, it was extremely important to make that crystal clear. Because they had come out of Roman Catholicism, and you know that Roman Catholicism utterly has corrupted the Word of God, and introduced the whole idea of human merit, that we can contribute to our salvation. And so, the men of the Reformation, they boldly preached justification by faith alone, without any human merit, without any contribution on our part. But what happened, they were accused that, by teaching that, that they would foster a licentious lifestyle. That means, that's a fancy word, that means that that would encourage people to simply live as they pleased; if it no longer matters, if our works, if our deeds do no longer contribute to our salvation, then what you are actually teaching—that's what they were accused of—that you can live as you please.

And that's why the same Question, as we've seen often, the Questions of the Catechism are profoundly phrased—*Why must we still do good works?* Why is the Word of God crystal clear that the obligation of the Christian is to live a godly life? And then comes the Answer, *Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image.* In other words, what this emphasizes, again, that when Christ saves us, he saves us for a purpose. Salvation does not merely mean that we are delivered from sin and all of its consequences; but we are redeemed unto something. We are redeemed, in order that, by his grace, we may again begin to live a life as God originally intended when he created Adam and Eve.

And boys and girls, you know that God created Adam and Eve in his image. He created them with the special ability to live a God-glorifying life; he created them with the ability to know the God who made them, to love him, and to serve him. And had sin not entered, they would have lived forever, and all of their descendents would have lived and enjoyed eternal life. But we know that, as a result of the fall, by nature we are failures. We utterly fail to live for the purpose for which we were made. And as fallen sinners, we're now ignorant of God, we love ourselves, we serve ourselves, and we please ourselves. And when Christ saves a sinner—and that's the Answer here—he saves that sinner for a purpose. And so, the Christ who has given his life as a ransom for his children, is the Christ who also, by his Spirit, then conforms us to his image.

So, in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17, we read: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” So, in other words, and I've said this before, reconciliation and restoration are inseparably connected, inseparably connected. And the whole point of this Lord's Day, too, is it is impossible to have been saved by Christ and not to be conformed to Christ. Christ never does the one without accomplishing the other.

And so, of course, what this really emphasizes is the two essential truths of the gospel, namely, justification and sanctification. And boys and girls, I know that you may, perhaps, still say that those are difficult words. But you hear them so often, and they are such important words of the gospel: justification and sanctification. So let me explain very simply what we mean by those two terms. In justification, our relationship with God is restored. That means, through justification, I, a sinner, become righteous again. God imputes to me the righteousness of Christ thereby restoring me into an unbreakable relationship with God. But sanctification is the life that flows out of that. So, not only are we restored into an intimate relationship with God, but that relationship then begins to function. That's how it is, even in natural life. The moment a child is conceived in its mother's womb, that body begins to grow, it begins to develop. And so it is, you will never have the one without the other. When Christ's brings us back to God, when, through him, we are reconciled with God, that results in a restored life. Another illustration I could use is the illustration

of marriage. We all know that the wedding day is a very important day. On the wedding day, the relationship between a young man and a young woman is publicly confirmed, it's publicly established, it's legally established. But we all understand that the wedding day is not the end of the story. What really matters is what now follows. What happens on the wedding day is the foundation of a married life, where husband and wife now dwell together and begin to enjoy that relationship that was established on their wedding day. And so it is in the work of redemption—it is when we are reconciled to God through the work of Christ, that Christ, who gave himself as a ransom, that Christ, by his Spirit, also renews us after his own image.

And so, the evidence of his work is that, by grace, we begin to resemble Christ. That means that we begin to manifest in our life that our union with him is real; that our union with him is a living union. That's why, when that's missing, the Bible says, we're none of his. Listen to Romans 8, verse 9: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." And so, a Christian is someone who is united to Christ. A Christian is someone who is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. And therefore, it cannot but be that that indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit begins to manifest itself in our lives. And remarkably, the Catechism calls the Spirit "the Spirit of Christ," because it is Christ merited the ministry of the Spirit of Christ. It is because of his finished work that the Holy Spirit can take a wretched sinner like us, dead in sins and trespasses, and transform that sinner into a temple of the Holy Ghost. And you see, when that Spirit dwells in us, the Spirit of Christ, his presence cannot but manifest itself, because the Spirit of Christ dwelling in the believer, will never be a dormant Spirit. He will be an active Spirit, a Spirit who works within us to conform us to the image of Christ. Because Romans 8 also tells us that that's the reason we were chosen in him. Chosen in him, the language of Ephesians 1. Dear believer, you have been chosen in Christ to become like Christ." Predestined, Paul says, Predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, because that was God's original purpose (verse 29). He created us in the image of his Son, so that, as the bearers of his Son's image, we would live a life supremely honoring and supremely glorifying to him. And we know of that Spirit of Christ, from John 16, that his work is to glorify Christ.

And so, dear believer, the Spirit who dwells now within you, his goal in your life, his goal in sanctification, is to make you more and more like unto Christ. And that's why that Spirit, his work is to make you increasingly spiritually tender; to make you increasingly sensitive to what the will of God is. That's why, when we sin, when we fail, when we grieve him, we will experience the bitter consequences of it. Because the goal of the Holy Spirit is to make us hypersensitive to sin, so that, by grace, more and more we will crucify and mortify our flesh, and that by grace, more and more something of Christ will become visible in our lives.

Well, let's move on to our second point.

2. An Obligation of Love

So, first of all, *An Evidence of Christ's Ministry*, the Christ who saves and redeems, and who dwells in us by his Spirit will manifest that presence by conforming us to his image. But it's also *An Obligation of Love*. That so, the Catechism says, *That so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us*. And so, Christ working in us should motivate us to live for him. "It is God," Paul writes in Philippians 2:13, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Colossians 1:29, the Apostle says, "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." So Paul is saying, because I know that the Spirit of God works in me mightily and dwells in me, that motivates me to labor; that motivates me to diligently strive to live a God-

glorifying, a Christ-glorifying life. So that *by the whole of our conduct*, our gratitude may be expressed—*the whole of our conduct*, all of it. Because that's what the grace of God does. It makes us a new creature. His indwelling presence, his work in us, the Spirit of Christ, ultimately will deal with every aspect of our lives.

But again, in Romans 12, verse 1, the Apostle also beautifully expresses that not only may we rejoice in what the Spirit does in us, but we have an obligation, by grace, to manifest this. Romans 12, verse 1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren," and so, he's referring to chapters 1 through 11, in light of everything the Apostle has explained about salvation—"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." And so, the argument that Paul is saying to the Roman Christians, given the fact that Christ gave himself as a sacrifice for your salvation, should make you willing to give yourself as a living sacrifice unto the Christ who saved you and who redeemed you. That is your reasonable service; that is your reasonable worship; that is your holy obligation. That's why we confess the name of Christ. Oh, how we ought to hate sin. Because when we sin, when we fail, we bring such dishonor on the Christ who redeemed us. That's why it's so important for the Christian to abide in Christ, to abide in him, to live out of him, in order to be able to live for him—*the whole of our conduct*.

As we will see, as we continue in the Heidelberg Catechism, that the life of gratitude, the life of the Christian consists of two components: obedience and prayer. Because, we will see that the Ten Commandments define for us what the Christian life must look like. The Ten Commandments give us God's revealed will for our lives. And so, we're going to look at the necessity of obeying God's precepts out of gratitude, but also the necessity of prayer. Try to remember this: precepts and prayer; the two components—an obedient life and a prayerful life—the two components of the Christian life. And as we will see, the true Christian is a Ten Commandment Christian. For the true Christian, all of God's precepts matter. For the true Christian is desirous to be obedient to God's will in every aspect of his or her life.

And that's the trust of the petition in Psalm 139, where David, at the end of that Psalm, in which he talks about the omniscience of God, where he says, Lord, search me. "Search me, O God...and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (verses 23–24). Can you relate to that, congregation? Can you relate to that desire? Is that the deep yearning of your soul? Do you pray, "Lord, if there are any areas in my life that are not yet sanctified; if there are any ways in my life whereby I grieve thee, and whereby I dishonor thee, and I bring ill repute upon thy name, Lord reveal it to me; make it known to me; search me, oh God." And so, David had learned the hard way that he wasn't capable of it himself. He realized he needed the grace of God to shine its searching light into his life. And if there be any wicked way within me; if there be any way in which I am dishonoring thee; if there's any way in which my walk contradicts what I profess, Lord, show it to me. And lead me in the way everlasting.

And so, this gratitude is expressed in the unconditional obedience to his revealed will; the desire to worship Christ in word and deed, in thought, word, and deed. In that sense, we could say, that the life of a Christian should be an act of worship, not just here where we come every Lord's Day to worship, but our entire life should be an expression of worship. Because, what does worship mean, again—the word "worship"? That means that we render honor to someone who is worthy to receive that honor. So, in our word "worship" we have the word "worthiness." And so, Christ is worthy. He is so worthy that we should honor him in thought, word, and deed; that we should honor him by seeking to live in obedience to his revealed will. Or, to put it simply, again, as I've said many times already, when you are connected to the living Word, Christ, you will desire

to honor his written Word. That's the Christian. That's the point that this Catechism is making here. You will never have the one without the other. It's impossible to be united to the living Word, and not to endeavor, by grace, to honor his written Word. That's why the Word of God is so precious to the believer. That's what Psalm 119—we will close with Psalm 119 tonight—that's this lengthy doxology to how the psalmist felt about the Word of God—176 verses, and only 2 verses in which a reference to the Scripture is not expressly stated. In every conceivable way, the psalmist expresses his love for God's precepts, his yearning for grace to live in obedience to those precepts. That should be the desire of the Christian.

What a blessing it is, if by grace, we live such a life; when by grace, we abide in Christ. That is such an essential part of the Christian life. But Christ invites us. He's saying, "I, the one who has saved you, oh, I urge you, my people, I urge you to abide in me; I urge you to stay with me; I urge you to walk with me; I urge you to live out of me, and to receive out of me grace for grace, out of my fulness." And the wonderful thing about John 15 is that Christ makes it so clear to his people, that "Everything you need to live a God-honoring life, everything you need is to be found in me. Open your mouth wide to me, and I will fill it."

The benefits are rich. Because the Catechism tells us that first of all, thereby we may be assured of our faith that our faith is genuine, *by the fruits thereof*. James 1, verse 22, he says, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." And so, the rich benefits, you see, when we live close to Christ, when we daily, daily interact with him through his Word, when we take our closet life seriously every day, the rich benefit is that Christ will fulfill his promise. And he says, "If you abide in me, I will abide in you, and you will bear much fruit." We will enjoy a sense of God's favor in our soul, assured of God's favor. That's why there's an intimate connection between obedience and assurance. That's why, when God's children fail and when they do not repent right away, when we backslide, we will become dark in our soul; we will lose our assurance. And so, it ought to be, because you see, the Spirit of Christ wants to teach us a lesson that it is a bitter thing to sin against God.

And so, when we, as Christians, when we begin to play fast and loose with the Word of God; when we become careless in our walk; when we begin to backslide, Christ will not endorse that sloppiness, he will not endorse that disobedience by a sense of his favor, and he will withdraw his favor. And every true Christian instinctively knows the connection between faith and obedience. That's why, when we fall, when we fail, Satan is there to pounce on us, to whisper in our ears, "You claim to be a Christian? You profess to be a child of God? Look at how you behave yourself. Look at what you just did." He'll try to make us despair of the mercy of God. That's why, a few weeks ago, we focused on 1 John 2, "If any man sin"—and we do; sin remains a reality until we breathe our last breath—but if we sin, oh, John says, remember, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (verse 1). And that's the beauty of the grace of God, that every day afresh, we may come to Christ. Every day afresh, we may come and confess our sins, to experience the truth of his Word, that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

That's why God gave Israel the morning and evening sacrifice, and he gave that sacrifice to teach them that God had made provision for them to live in daily fellowship and communion with him. God knew that his people would fail daily, but he wanted to teach them, by means of that repetition all those years; and at the beginning of the day, and at the end of the day, he was always ready to forgive. That's why Satan, when we fail, when we sin, that's why he tries to bring us to despair. That's when he tries to draw us away from Christ. And he deceives us. Instead of realizing, as we said a few weeks ago, what the Puritans were fond of saying—Baxter was the one who

originally said it—for every look we take at ourselves, we must take ten looks at Christ.

Christ promises us, in John 15 that when we so live with him, when we abide in him, we will experience the favor of God upon us. That's why the devil knows he cannot rob you of your salvation. That, he cannot do, but he can rob you of the joy of your salvation. He can interrupt your fellowship and communion with Christ. That's why you have to learn to counter that liar from the beginning, who deceives us. And when we sin, and when we fail, and when, to our sorrow, we recognize it, to counter him, and say, "Yes, devil, I did, I failed. I failed. I failed miserably, but there is forgiveness, there is forgiveness with him. He has said that if I come to him, and I confess my sin, even though I do it a hundred times, he will pardon me a hundred times"—seventy times seven times.

And it says, *That by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ*. That's also a very important point, congregation. In other words, as someone has said—not original with me—that a godly Christian, a Christ-like Christian, who walks with Christ, is God's best advertisement in a fallen world. And Christ said that, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). And so, the Catechism is saying that our life should be a statement. By our lives, the truth of God's Word should become visible. In some cases, your and my life may be the only Bible people will ever read. And so, *by our godly conversation that others may be gained to Christ*.

Peter writes, in 1 Peter 2, verse 12, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." First Peter 3, verse 1—Peter now is addressing godly wives. What also happened, of course, in the early New Testament history, that as the gospel came among the Gentiles, and God blessed it, and sinners came to saving faith, often, it would become a divided marriage. The husband would be saved, but not the wife; or the wife would be saved, and not the husband. So what Peter is saying to godly wives, he says, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands"—honor them—"that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear."

3. A Touchstone for Self-Examination

And so, the question for me and for you is, "Is your life a testimony?" Does our life witness the truth to others? Can even the ungodly see something of Christ emanating from our lives? That's the purpose for which we have been saved; the purpose for which we have been redeemed—chosen in Christ, to become like Christ, to honor Christ in every aspect of our lives. *Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?* (Question #87). The Answer is, *By no means*. And I've already woven this throughout my whole sermon, so I can be brief here.

The key word there is "continuing". Because, if you turn to 1 Corinthians 6, verses 9 and 10, you read this: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." You will say, "Well, who then can be saved?" Because, congregation, this is a statement about what we are capable of as sinners. That's what it is. But the key word is, if we continue in that. Because there is salvation for any of the sinners that I mentioned there. The Bible is filled with examples. And if we have any self-knowledge, we, if we are a Christian, we are a living example. But the key word is "continuing". And so, God's children still commit sins,

sometimes grievous sins, but they no longer continue in it. So before conversion, we are habitually unrighteous, and occasionally righteous. After conversion, we become habitually righteous and occasionally unrighteous. Before conversion we pursue sin. After conversion, sin pursues us.

And so, God's children still sin. Out of weakness, they fall into sin, but they no longer live there. Now, David's sin was great. We referred to it this morning, and it took at least nine months before he repented. But he did not live the rest of his life that way. He fell into sin, but did not abide in it. That's the difference, you see. But anyone who claims to be a Christian, and yet continues to live an ungodly life is deceiving himself. Because by their fruits ye shall know them. So Christ says, if you are a hearer of my Word and not a doer, you are a foolish man, and your whole house will one day come crumbling down. James, in the chapter we read, he said, just because you claim to believe in God doesn't prove anything, because the devils too, they also believe in God, and they even tremble. Some people don't tremble. No, saving faith—that's the whole point of this Lord's Day—saving faith. Even though we are saved by faith alone, saving faith is never alone. Saving faith in Christ results in a life for Christ, in which, by the grace of God, with our whole conversation, we seek to honor the Christ who has saved and redeemed us. Just like Eddie Rickenbacker, the rest of his life, showed his gratitude for the fact that his life was saved by the death of a gull. And that is the holy obligation of the people of God.

And I realize that we have but a small beginning of that new obedience. But can you relate to the desire and yearning of Paul? Oh, he says, "that I might know him, that I might know more of him." In Philippians 3, verse 12, he says, "Not as though I had already attained"—I haven't attained, I'm not an accomplished Christian—"either were already perfect: but," he says, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." So, because I have been apprehended by him, I therefore endeavor to apprehend that for which I was apprehended. My desire is that I would live a life that honors this Christ who redeemed me.

And therefore, Psalm 119 ends so remarkably—verse 176, we're going to sing it together. At the end of it all, at the end of this amazing Psalm, what's the bottom line? He says, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." That's it. That's the Christian. We still sin. We foolishly go astray. But it grieves the Christian. It grieves him. That's why he said, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

And so, my dear congregation, and it includes me: what does the whole of your and my conduct communicate? What does it testify? That's why we have the solemn words in 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" That's the whole point. When Jesus Christ dwells in us by his Spirit, it will manifest itself in our lives, by the grace of God. So, since that we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, we must still do good works, as an expression of our love and gratitude for the Savior who has saved me to the uttermost. Amen.

Let's pray.

Our gracious God, we thank thee for the privilege of having been in thy house today, for hearing thy Word proclaimed to us, also the very essential truths set before us by way of the Catechism, that faith in Christ results in a life with Christ, and for Christ, and unto Christ. Lord, may we examine ourselves whether we are in the faith; the faith that will always bear fruit; the faith that has Christ as its object; but also the faith that has Christ as its goal, so that we would say with the Apostle, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Oh, that none of us would deceive ourselves

by confessing the name of Christ, and living a life that contradicts that profession. Remember us so in mercy, as we depart from here. Go with us in this coming week, when we return to the workplace, we return to where thou hast called us to be. Oh, enable us, by grace, to honor Christ precisely where thou hast called us to be. Forgive all of our sins of this day and hour. We ask it alone in Jesus' name. Amen.