

Salvation and Fruit and Thanksgiving Galatians 5:16-26; Heidelberg Catechism, Q and A 86-87

In the Christian life, it isn't always this easy to discern the difference between real and counterfeit good works. But, as the Catechism makes clear, those who have been redeemed by Christ's blood and renewed by His Spirit do produce genuine fruits of gratitude.

I. The Goal of Salvation: To Do Good

A. Q 86 of the Catechism asks

We have been delivered from our misery by God's grace alone through Christ and not because we have earned it: why then must we still do good?

The thought here is the obedience to God's commands. So, the real question that is being asked is, "Why then must we obey God's will?"

B. The answer can be summed up this way: *We obey not to earn salvation, but as the fruit of salvation.* Jeremiah 31:33; Titus 2:13-14; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Peter 2:9.

The Catechism tells us that Christ has not only "redeemed us by his blood" but "by His Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself." He has made us into a brand-new creation, and being a new creation, we are to produce fruit (do good works) according to our new nature.

C. Based upon Scripture the Catechism teaches us here that justification and sanctification always go together. It is not just a matter of right standing with God; it is also a matter of right living in the presence of God. To put it another way, *grace is a privilege; but with this privilege comes the responsibility of fruitful and obedient living.*

D. Based upon Scripture the Catechism lets us know that it is normal and natural for the redeemed to do good. Doing good is not something strange for Christians; for them it is as natural as breathing, sleeping, or eating. In fact, doing good is inevitable for the Christian. It is something he or she cannot help but do. John 15:5

It also follows *that if we do not do good, if we are not grateful to God, if we are not obedient, then we are not saved.* Those who do no good are not part of the Kingdom of God. Those who do no good are not part of the vine that is Christ. Those who do no good are not renewed by Christ's Spirit.

Question and Answer 87 affirms this thought for us. It asks,

Can those be saved who do not turn to God from their ungrateful and impenitent ways?

Another way to ask this is, "Are those saved who do no good?" The answer: "By no means." You are not saved if you do no good.

James 2:17 says, *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* And, Martin Luther said, "We are saved by faith alone; but the faith which saves us is never alone." Or, to say the same thing in different words, *we cannot have Jesus as Savior if we refuse to honor Him as Lord.* Salvation involves conversion. And those who don't get converted, who don't live the new life, have not been saved.

One of the goals of our salvation, then, is the fullness of the redeemed, sanctified, thankful life. One of the goals of our salvation is to do good.

II. Why We Do Good

A. When we look at the Catechism's answer, we see that a grateful and obedient life is a testimony in three directions: it speaks to God, it speaks to ourselves, and it speaks to our unsaved neighbor.

First, says the Catechism, the life of gratitude speaks to God. Our lives glorify God when they produce what He intended. We do good, says the Catechism,

so that in all our living

we may show that we are thankful to God

for all he has done for us,

and so that he may be praised through us.

God loves to see His people do good. The life of gratitude is to Him a song of praise.

Westminster Catechism:

Q 1. What is the chief end of man?

A 1. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

In living the life of gratitude, we are finally doing what God created us for: to live for His glory.

We need to understand that we are created, saved, and sanctified for God's praise and glory.

B. Second, the life of gratitude also speaks to us. According to the Catechism, "we do good so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits." There is a difference between artificial flowers and flowers, between artificial fruit and real fruit. It's the same way with faith. Sometimes it is so apparent that a person's faith is not real. Other times it is not immediately obvious. Jesus, however, gives us a litmus test so we can tell the difference between a real and an artificial faith.

Jesus says, (Mt 7:16-17) "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."

In the same way, a person with a real faith produces fruits of gratitude.

If you are questioning your salvation, look in your life for good, for obedience to the Word, for thankfulness. If you, by the grace of God, find good, you are assured of your faith by its fruits.

C. Third, the life of gratitude also speaks to our unbelieving neighbor. According to the Catechism, ... we do good ...

so that by our godly living

our neighbors may be won over to Christ.

This is one of the few places where the Catechism speaks of evangelism.

Quite often our good is designed to make ourselves look good, to win friends, to influence people. But the Catechism reminds us more than once that the gain from our works is supposed to go to Christ, or to God. Matthew 5:16.

In 1 Peter 2:12, Peter sees a situation where unbelievers speak evil of Christians. Peter says *that the believers should deny that evil with their lives*. Then the pagans will have their eyes opened and conclude that the God of these believers must be good and great.

In 1 Peter 3:1-2, Peter explains that women, who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, must remember that their continuous talk about Jesus to their unbelieving husband is nothing more than a nagging nuisance to them. It's time to be quiet and let their lives to the preaching.

In each instance the Gospel is first presented in Word. Christians press the claims of Jesus Christ upon the unbelieving. But there comes a time when we must stop talking and start doing. *Our lives must back up our words and be an eloquent testimony to the power and claims of Christ.*