

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE : SUNDAY 25 September 2011 EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 119:13,14

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 149:1,2

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 116:1,5

Scripture reading: John 15:1-8; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's day 32

Scripture text: John 15:5-8

New International Version (NIV)

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Heidelberg Catechism

86. Q. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace alone through Christ, without any merit of our own, why must we yet do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit to be His image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for His benefits,^[1] and He may be praised by us.^[2] Further, that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits,^[3] and that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ.^[4]

^[1] Rom. 6:13; 12:1, 2; 1 Pet. 2:5-10. ^[2] Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. ^[3] Matt. 7:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:10, 11. ^[4] Matt. 5:14-16; Rom. 14:17-19; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1, 2.

87. Q. Can those be saved who do not turn to God from their ungrateful and impenitent walk of life?

A. By no means. Scripture says that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, greedy person, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or the like shall inherit the kingdom of God.^[1]

^[1] 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5, 6; 1 John 3:14.

Theme: Good deeds are the logic necessity of salvation

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, when we start with Lord's Day 32, we start with the chapter in our catechisms we start with the part that deals with our gratitude. Let us regard this question.

When we remove the true question, we first encounter a statement, which reads as follows:

We are delivered from our sins by grace through Christ alone. After this statement we come to the actual question: **Why must we still do good deeds?**

In this statement, which we have taken out of question 86, we see a sturdy Reformed confession, it is indeed two of the five principles of the reformation: **Solus Christus** and **Sola Gratia**. When we say **Solus Christus** we say: We can only be saved by the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. Nothing that we do can lead to our salvation. With the words **Sola Gratia** we say: Nothing that we do, deserves any favour or gift from our God, not even salvation. God loves human kind, and therefore He bestows grace upon His children and saves them.

With this confession, all of us agree, and because this confession of ours is true, the next question follows: I we are saved through Christ by the grace of God, why then must we do good works? This question implies that good deeds are indeed necessary – it is in fact written: why **must we still do good deeds** – although the good works cannot lead us to salvation. What then can we achieve by these good deeds, if it plays no part in our salvation?

Beloved it is necessary for us to answer this question. The Roman Catholic Church, way back during the reformation, accused the Reformers that our way of understanding salvation, creates indifferent and reckless people. The Roman Church judged that the Reformers ignore

the necessity of good deeds, when we say that we can be saved by Christ alone. The Roman Church places good deeds with salvation and not gratitude for believers to realise the importance thereof.

By means of question 86, the Holy Spirit, tonight, focuses our attention on good deeds and the meaning they have for us.

It is true: Christ has saved us wholly from all our sin and misery. With His blood He redeemed us from the power of sin and the devil and reconciled us with God. To this we hold on dearly, as there is no other way that we can be saved/redeemed. Christ does not only save/redeem us He also changes us completely from the inside. He renews us through His Holy Spirit to resemble His image. In other words: through shedding His blood He made sure we are called righteous by God. To be righteous means to be innocent. His work did not end there, as He also sanctifies us. This He does through the work that the Holy Spirit does inside us.

The result of the sanctifying and renewing work of the Holy Spirit is that we amongst other things start to do good deeds. With them, we acknowledge that our own good deeds are deeply founded in Christ. We, the faithful, do not out of the blue start doing good deeds just because Christ redeemed us. We would surely have become haughty, if we could do good deeds by ourselves. Then we could say that our good deeds are a counter achievement or a repayment for what Christ has done for us and the result of this way of thinking is that people think they do not need Christ for their redemption and salvation. No, it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, that makes us grateful for His salvation and because of that makes us willing to do good deeds.

This fact, Christ makes clear when He says: ⁵ **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”**

It is impossible for the branches to grow and bear fruit if they are not reached by the vital fluids that are given to them by the vine. We can do nothing but bear fruit as we are branches that have been grafted on the vine. The Holy Spirit has grafted us into Christ we have no choice but to do good deeds out of gratitude.

Thus, the good deeds that we do are in truth a gift from God given to us through Christ and the Holy Spirit. But what God gives to us He also demands in return. He demands that we do good deeds and because the Holy Spirit sanctifies and renews us, He makes us willing to do good deeds, and thus we are compelled to do them. And now we have the responsibility to do good deeds.

He who does bad deeds or simply just does not do good deeds, is not a saved child of God. How can a shoot be grafted into the vine and not bear fruit? This is totally impossible. A shoot that does not bear fruit is cut away by the farmer and thrown into the fire. Therefore we confess very clearly: *that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, greedy person, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or the like shall inherit the kingdom of God.* Where there are no

good deeds, no fruits of gratitude, there is also no communion with Christ as the true vine.

But now, does it mean that, if I once made myself guilty of divorce, or if had been drunk once or have committed the one or other sin, I am lost? Definitely not, beloved brother and sister. In question 87 people are mentioned who **persevere in their ungrateful and ungodly way of life and do not repent and turn to God**. With such people you do not find good deeds. However, he who does good deeds out of gratitude, but because of weakness falls into sin, has a true sorrow over the sin and repents wholeheartedly, can be certain that they will have a part in the kingdom of God.

Are good deeds necessary? Yes, because we are grafted into Christ we can do nothing else than good deeds. The good deeds further serve as a token that we have a living relationship with Christ, which brings us to the meaning of good deeds. We confess that good deeds have three meanings, namely: **to show our gratitude towards God, to receive assurance of our faith and to win our neighbour for Christ**.

It is absolutely necessary for us to give thanks for the salvation that God has given us. Our salvation from the might of Satan and sin is through and through the word of the Trinity. The father sent His only son to become human. Jesus Christ, out of love for the Father, walked the path of humiliation ending in His death on the cross, in order to pay for our sins. The Holy Spirit makes the salvation through Christ our own through faith. We have no other choice now than to be grateful and we show this gratitude through the good deeds that we do. He who is grateful for salvation through Jesus Christ, must do good deeds, he has no other choice. He, who does no good deeds, stands alienated from the salvation through Jesus Christ.

Beloved, as Christ establishes His Reign in our lives, good deeds follow. We see this in the life of Zacchaeus. When Christ established Himself in Zacchaeus's life, Zacchaeus spontaneously ceased doing sin, corrected his wrongful doings and started doing good deeds. The shoots that grow on the vine, spontaneously bear fruit. They are not forced. He who is grateful for the salvation through Jesus Christ does not need to be forced, like a slave, to do good deeds, he does it spontaneously.

We further confess that we do good deeds **that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits**. This means that we can see from our good deeds that we truly are children of God. You can see that the shoot grows from the vine as their are fruit on the shoot.

Faith bears fruit and faith is known by the fruit it bears. Someone, who bears no fruit of repentance and gratitude, cannot claim that he is grafted in the true vine. Someone, who says that he is a Christian, but, does not behave as one, lies. How can someone persevere in his sinful ways and claim that he has a personal relationship with God?

The person who, - even if it is in his weakness- do good, who cast of the love of the world and hate sin, who reads the Word of God and listens to it, who serves God in word and deed and

helps his neighbour and supports him with love, shows clearly that he is a believer. All these things are fruits of faith, as no man does any of these things himself. And because these fruits can be seen, the person who does these things has the proof that he truly is a child of God. And he who, more and more, take Christ and His salvation into his heart will bear more and more fruit. **If you remain in me, says Christ, and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.**

Dearest brother, sister and child, if you notice these good deeds in your life, thank God for them, as He works them in you, through the Holy Spirit. Know for sure, because these fruits are visible in your life, you are one of God's chosen children

The believer, who does good deeds, is not the only person who sees these good deeds. The people around us will also see these good deeds. Many will make fun of the deeds that they see. Remember what happened when the first believers started speaking in different languages after the Holy Spirit descended on them. Some of the Jews said that Peter and the others were full of sweet wine. For other people the good deeds could be a magnet. They will be drawn closer, not only to be closer to the faithful believers but also to bring glory to Christ and our Father.

That is why we confess **that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ.** A God fearing life is a life in which good deeds according to God's will is apparent. And now, apart from all the other things that do not lead people to Christ, we have to ask ourselves: do we still draw people towards Christ or do we push them away.

We all know how a magnet works. A magnet has a north and a south pole. When you bring the north and south pole of a magnet together, they will attract each other. However, when you bring the north or south poles of two magnets together they will repel each other. You can try as hard as you may but you will not bring the two magnets together.

This same image we can see amongst people. Believers who do good deeds, that is, who lives differently than the sinful world, will draw an unbeliever towards God. But a believer who does not do good or bad deeds, will never draw an unbeliever to Christ, no matter how hard he tries to succeed. Such a person will always repel his neighbour from Christ.

Beloved, God alone does not demand that we do good deeds. Even the unbelievers, and rightly so, expects that a Christian shall live a different type of life as opposed to those who do not know Christ. Therefore we must be serious about the instruction of Peter 2:12: ¹² **Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.**

It is clear to us then that good deeds ultimately finds its meaning in the glorification of God. That is why Christ also says in John 15:8:

⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Let us then, despite our own weaknesses and the jokes of those who are from the world, continue to do good deeds and glory our Father through them.

Amen!

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm: Psalm 116:4, 7, 10

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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