

Christian Doctrine

#1 - Who am I?

It is only by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit that any person relies on God's Son, Jesus Christ, for pardon, for righteousness and for heaven. If a person believes in Jesus, it is only because of God's activity. A Christian is a product of God, brought into existence by the Holy Spirit's use of the means of grace.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:10a)...

#2 - Why am I here?

#3 - Why am I here?

But once people have heard and believed the gospel, God isn't done with them. He wants his believing children to devote their lives to serving him. God has made us who we are, and he also tells us what he would have us do as his children.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

#4 - Christians need to remember that they are created. They are a work of God. But they are also to work for God.

#5 - Good Works

Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar (Psalm 51:19 KJV).

There were four kinds of bloody sacrifices which God prescribed for his Old Testament people. One of them, the whole burnt offering, was an offering which was completely consumed by the fire of the altar. As the complete animal was consumed, so also the worshiper who brought the sacrifice was expressing his complete commitment and devotion to the Lord.

#6 - When Paul wrote to the Romans, he picked up on this Old Testament offering which signified complete devotion to God. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he wrote:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).

Our service to God, our complete commitment and devotion to him are not what make us Christians. It is in view of God's mercy that we devote every aspect of our physical lives to serving the Lord. Complete devotion and commitment to the Lord with pure thoughts, wholesome words and loving actions are our grateful responses to God's mercy. Martin Luther's Small Catechism gives this definition of good works:

A good work is whatever a believer does according to God's Word out of love and thanks for all of God's goodness.

#7 - What makes a good work good?

Our good works are not inherently good. God does not consider our works as good simply because they are done by such upstanding people as ourselves. God considers our works as good for the sake of his Son. Because a Christian still has a sinful nature, everything he does, even those things which are perfectly according to God's commandments (like giving flowers to a loved one) is tainted with sin. Only because of his mercy and kindness does God delight in everything which the believer does out of love for Christ. We and our godly actions are acceptable to God only by virtue of the blood of Christ which

purifies us from all sin. This is what it means to do good works in the name of the Lord Jesus, with faith that he has made us and our good deeds acceptable to God.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17).

Good works do not produce Christians. Christians produce good works.

#8 - Why we want to do good works

Romans 12:1 stated that in view of God's mercy we now live to serve God. In the following three passages, pick out the phrases which give the reason for doing good works:

We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

#9 - Why we want to do good works

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

The Christian is no longer coerced by fear and the threat of eternal judgment but energized by Christ's love to love both God and his fellow human beings. The reason for doing good works is not to earn salvation but rather to thank God for the salvation which he has assured and promised us through Christ.

#10 - Change of attitude

In a previous lesson it was noted that by nature we love to sin and hate God.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:3).

What brought about the radical change so that now we hate to sin and we love God? This radical change is due completely to the work of the Holy Spirit. His work is called sanctification, a term which means to set aside for a holy purpose. When he brought us to faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit also gave us a new heart, a heart which no longer wishes to rebel against Christ but to serve him, a heart which no longer hates God but loves him and wants to do all that he says.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17)!

#11 - God's will for our lives has never changed. As we look for a guide for thankful living, God directs us again to his law – the same law that exposed our sin. Because of Jesus, however, we now see that God's love is behind his law, and that he intends it for our good.

God's law serves in the lives of all people first of all as a mirror, exposing to us our many sins and our damning sinfulness.

#12 - God's law serves in the lives of all people secondly as a curb, a deterrent, to keep evil outbursts to a minimum by threatening punishment.

#13 - God's law serves only in the lives of Christians as a guideline, showing the way of life which is pleasing to God. Only Christians use God's law as a guideline because only they believe that God has redeemed them through Christ and only they have the proper motivation to do good works – thanks to God for his gifts of forgiveness and eternal life.

#14 - God's law will always work as a mirror. But because of the cross of Jesus, the law also serves as a guideline for Christians who want to thank their Lord by the way they live.

#15 - God's law is and always will be good, but it is powerless to produce the good works that it demands. Like a set of railroad tracks, God's law will point you in exactly the direction you need to go (to live in such a way that you are expressing your thanks to your Savior God) but it will never provide any fuel to make the train go.

#16 - The good news about Jesus, however, also includes the message that he is our strength and that he will work through us to produce good works for the glory of the Lord. Our production of good works is directly proportional to how firmly we are connected to Christ.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5).

#17 - The incomplete message

- You have been unkind (law).
- Jesus loved everyone without fail and paid with his life for your unkindness (gospel).
- Now knock off that sinful living and be kind to each other (law)!

#18 - The complete message

- You have been unkind (law).
- Jesus loved everyone without fail and paid with his life for your unkindness (gospel).
- Go and sin no more. It is God's will that you be kind to each other (law).
- Jesus lives in you and will strengthen you to be kind (gospel)!

#19 - Two Gospel Promises

- 1) To be relieved of the guilt of our own sins, we need to hear again and again the gospel promise of God's forgiveness. The more we hear, the more we believe that we are truly forgiven.
- 2) To live holy lives which are pleasing to God, we need to hear again and again the gospel promise of God's strength. The more we hear, the more we believe that God will strengthen us to do what is right.

Not the demands of God's law but the promises of God's gospel make us willing and able to serve God.

...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

#20 - Our daily struggle

Day in and day out, every Christian faces three enemies – Satan, the unbelieving world, and his own sinful nature. Each influences and tempts the Christian to sin. Working together, the members of this "unholy trinity" are endlessly seeking to drive us into false belief, despair and other great and shameful sins. Sadly, we often give in and lose the battle which the Lord would have us fight against them.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:15-16).

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it (Romans 7:14-20).

#21 - Justification

Justification refers to our being declared just, holy or not guilty by God for the sake of Jesus and his work as our substitute. Justification is perfect and complete.

#22 - Sanctification

Sanctification refers to our being set apart from the unbelieving world to lead a God-pleasing life. Sanctification is gradual and always incomplete in this life.

#23 - The daily significance of Baptism

One place the Lord invites us to look for strength and assistance to live for his glory is to our baptism. There we find God's promise that our sinful nature need no longer control us and that daily God gives us the new attitude of wanting to leave sin behind.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:1-14).

#24 - THE MEANING OF BAPTISM FOR OUR DAILY LIFE

Fourth: What does baptizing with water mean?

Baptism means that the Old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St. Paul says in Romans, chapter 6, "We were buried with [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."