

Good Works in the Covenant

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Bible Text: Lord's Day 32; Psalm 89:1-37

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Our Scripture reading this morning is Psalm 89. We will read the first 37 verses of Psalm 89. If you would do a study of Psalm 89, you would soon recognize that every doctrine of the covenant would be drawn and demonstrated and proved from this Psalm, particularly every aspect that is so important to us as Protestant Reformed churches. With that in mind, let's read Psalm 89.

We start out, the first two verses are the child of God praising God for his covenant.

1 I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. 2 For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.

Now God speaks.

3 I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, 4 Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.

Now the believer responds.

5 And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. 6 For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD? 7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. 8 O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? 9 Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. 10 Thou hast broken Rahab [that is Egypt] in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm. 11 The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. 12 The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name. 13 Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and

high is thy right hand. 14 Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face. 15 Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. 16 In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. 17 For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. 18 For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king. 19 Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. 20 I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: 21 With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. 22 The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. 23 And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. 24 But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. 25 I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. 26 He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. 27 Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. 28 My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. 29 His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. 30 If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; 31 If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; 32 Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. 33 Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. 34 My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. 35 Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. 36 His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. 37 It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.

So far we read God's holy word.

The basis of this and all of Scripture is the instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 32. Lord's Day 32. There in Question 86, the Catechism asks,

Q. 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?

A. 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.

Q. 87. Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?

A. 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.

Beloved, in our Lord Jesus Christ, I pointed out the way that Psalm 89 began. How the first two verses are God's people's beginning of praise to God for the great salvation, "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever," and how then God in verse 3 and 4 speaks to his people, "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant," then how in verses 5 all the way through verse 18, the child of God responds with praise to God for the great and glorious covenant and the blessings of the covenant. That, people of God, is the result that God expects from us. When God takes someone into his own covenant life in Jesus Christ, makes them to experience the blessings of the covenant, applies to him all the blessings of salvation within that covenant, what does he expect but that that one who has been brought into that covenant and supplied with all these blessings, given all these blessings, that that person would then respond with praise. That's exactly what God expects and when God expects something, that's what he demands. It's a command.

That's exactly the viewpoint of Lord's Day 32. Lord's Day 32 stands as the introductory Lord's Day of the third section of the Catechism: unthankfulness. Unthankfulness. The first section, as you all know, is the section which sets forth the cause of our misery. Man broke the covenant of God, that beautiful relationship that he had with God. He broke that covenant and he lost all the blessings of the covenant and became the object of God's wrath. There is his misery, God's wrath because of man's own guilt.

The second section gives us the knowledge of deliverance, how God supplied a Mediator of the covenant who came and through his suffering and death redeemed us and brought us back into the covenant of God, re-established that covenant, a covenant of grace. Not a covenant that God had with Adam within the creation which was friendship, of course, but now the covenant of grace. The full realization of that first covenant but now in Jesus Christ.

So we come to the third section, how do we show our gratitude to God. Covenantal gratitude to God is what must be set forth in this third section. Lord's Day, then, answers the question: why must we? Why must we as God's covenant people do good works? We've been saved already, we've been saved through Jesus Christ without any single work that we've ever done so the question is: why must we then continue to do good works? It proceeds exactly on the same basis that has been set forth in the earlier parts of the Heidelberg Catechism. Lord's Day 24 already showed that we are justified by faith alone without any works. Works have no part, no part as far as earning the salvation, as far as contributing to salvation. There is nothing in our works that would add to that.

So why do good works? Let's see what the Catechism has to say about that. How does the Catechism answer that question? Why must we still do good works? Examining it from the point of view of the covenant, we take as the theme of this Lord's Day then "Good Works in the Covenant." Good works in the covenant.

Notice in the first place the relationship, that is, what's the relationship between good works on the one hand and the covenant on the other. Secondly, we'll consider the desire. The desire to do good works in the covenant. And thirdly, the blessing of doing good works in the covenant. The covenant and good works, noticing first of all the relationship.

I want to set forth three aspects of the relationship between good works and the covenant. Three aspects. They are closely related and one of them is negative, what it's not. Let's start with the positive side. What is the relationship between good works and the covenant? I'd say, first of all, the relationship is they are inseparable. Where you find the one, you will find the other. Good works and the covenant are inseparable. That's evident from a negative point of view from the last Question and Answer 87 which asks, remember, "Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?" Can they be saved? And then it lists a number of sins: unchaste person, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, and so on, covetous men, and it indicates that those people will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those people are not in the covenant and when I say in the covenant, I don't mean merely that they're in the sphere of the covenant, I mean that God has not established his covenant with them. They are not covenant people. 1 John 1 makes that connection between covenant fellowship and a life of good works or at least getting sin out of our lives.

1 John 1 says, "This then is the message which we have heard of him," in verse 5, "and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness," and that's Question 87, if we walk in darkness but we say, "Oh, I have fellowship with him," but we walk in darkness, this is what the word of God says, "we lie. We do not have fellowship with God and we do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

The reason why good works and the covenant are always inseparable is that God is light. He has established a covenant relationship between himself and his people in Jesus Christ, a relationship of friendship where God speaks with them, welcomes them into his presence, and has fellowship with his people. God is our God. We are his people. We fellowship with him but this God is light, according to 1 John. This light is holiness itself. It is impossible for the holy God to fellowship with unholiness so he saves their people from their sins. He sanctifies his people so that they may live with him and so that he is able himself to have fellowship with him.

You read further in 1 John, yes, we're all sinners, how can God have fellowship with us? The next verses say it's by confession of those sins. That's how we get rid of those sins and that's why God would welcome us into his presence because those sins are forgiven

and then he sanctifies us so that we live in obedience. Those who continue to live in the sins that are set forth there in Question 87 demonstrate they are not sanctified, they are not a part of the body of Jesus Christ, they have no place in the covenant and church of God and God does not fellowship with them. They do not partake of the blessings of salvation. They produce only evil works and no good works.

The covenant and good works are inseparable. Every single person who is brought into the covenant by God's grace is redeemed in the blood of Christ, sanctified by the Spirit. They produce good works. Secondly, the connection or the relationship between the covenant on the one hand and good works on the other, from a negative point of view. What it is not. What it is not. Good works are not the basis of the covenant in any sense of the word.

If you had a covenant theology where the covenant is an agreement between two parties, between God on the one hand and man on the other hand, that they come together and they make an agreement, then God comes to man and says, "This is what I promise to do in the covenant," and man must respond and say, "This is my part. This is what I will do in the covenant," and God's part is this, "I will save you from your sin. I will send my Son and save you and our part is we will obey you. We will obey thy commandments," then the works become part of the very basis of the covenant because we have an agreement here. And every businessman knows, you make an agreement, you sign a contract, both sides have to uphold their part of the bargain otherwise the agreement is null and void. So if you have a covenant view that is in agreement, works become part of the basis of the covenant.

Closely related is a conditional covenant. A conditional covenant is a covenant which depends on our good works, or as they like to say, on our faithfulness. Our faithfulness. God comes and establishes the covenant with us, promises all the blessings to us in that covenant, but it depends on our activity of believing in those promises and then living in obedience. Our faithfulness that maintains that covenant. It's because we believe that the covenant is realized. It's because we continue in that belief and obedience that it is realized.

Such good works are presented as a prerequisite either to entering into the kingdom of God or as a way of us maintaining that covenant. There was a minister in the Protestant Reformed churches in 1952 that said our act of conversion is prerequisite to entering the kingdom. You have to do this then, you see, conversion which is a good work, that becomes the very basis for the covenant that we have with God.

Good works are not a basis for the covenant. Psalm 89 makes that so abundantly plain that good works are not the basis. God establishes his covenant and we'll see that more later, he establishes it with Jesus Christ who is the one who says, "Thou art my Father." That's Christ. And then he establishes it with his seed and his seed, the seed of Christ, are his children. And now notice what God says here in Psalm 89. "If his children," us, we, "If his children forsake my law and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments," if those works are the foundation of the covenant, then

at this point God will say, "Well, then the covenant is finished. If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then I am done with them. They have not kept their part of the bargain." That's not what God says. "If they do that," and we would say, "when they do that, then I," said God, "will visit their transgression with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him," from Christ because the covenant is with him and with his seed. Then in verse 34, "My covenant will I not break." The covenant is unbreakable. We break the covenant in the sense of transgressing it but from God's point of view, "My covenant will I not break," because, you see, our works have no standing, no ground, no basis, that is to uphold the covenant. It's not a basis for the covenant in any sense of the word.

Good works and the covenant are inseparable. Good works are not the foundation, the basis of the covenant. But thirdly, positively, good works are the fruit of the covenant of grace. They are the fruit of the covenant. I actually have to back up here. I want to demonstrate not only from Psalm 89 but from the Catechism that our works are not the basis of the covenant.

Let's look for a moment at Question 86. Just the question, that's all I want to consider with you for the moment. Notice what the Question teaches us. "Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without our merit, without any merit of ours, why must we do good works?" There are four things in that question that indicate that our good works are not in any way a contributing factor to the covenant of God being maintained.

Since then we are delivered, notice how important your grammar is, children, your English grammar in school. What's important about that? We are delivered. It's called the passive voice. Not the active voice. If it's active, then I delivered. No, I didn't deliver, it says, "we are delivered." Somebody else delivered me. Somebody else did the work. I had nothing to do with it. It's like being pulled out of the swimming pool where I'm drowning. Somebody else pulled me out. I was delivered. God had to do that. I didn't deliver myself. You didn't deliver yourself. We are delivered.

Secondly, "merely of grace." Merely of grace. Grace right away is contrasted with works. You didn't earn anything. Grace means it's unmerited, you didn't earn it. Grace means that it's merely God's good pleasure that he determined to take this person and not that person. Out of his grace he said, "This is the one that I will save." Merely of grace we have been saved.

The third thing in that Question is, "through Christ." There's the agent. There's the one who saves us. We did absolutely nothing. No power of ours. No effort of ours. No ability of ours. It all has to come from someone else. It is through Jesus Christ that we have been saved.

Then finally, "without any merit of ours." There's the negative of all that. Without any merit of ours. Merit means you earn something. You go and take a test and you get a C on it, you get a B on it, you get an A on it, you merited that. You earned it by your works.

You didn't merit salvation. You didn't earn anything. Without any merit of ours. So our good works contribute nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Now let's go to the fourth part of the relationship between good works and the covenant, namely that good works are the fruit of the covenant of grace. Being in the covenant means that we will produce good works. It's the fruit. The reason that's true is set forth in the Answer 86, the first part of that answer, "Because, because Christ having redeemed and delivered us by his blood," that's number 1. Christ redeemed and delivered us by his blood. The covenant is established with Jesus Christ. He is the one referred to in Psalm 89 as the King, symbolized in David, and then typified in David and then typified in his son Solomon, but ultimately it's Jesus Christ, the one who will say, "Thou art my Father." That's Jesus. God establishes his covenant with him and therefore with all those who are in him, his seed, who are in him when he goes to the cross and he takes the sins of those who are in him and he pays for those sins on the cross. He has redeemed us by his own blood.

If you are, therefore, one of those people with whom God has established his covenant, your sins are forgiven. You are redeemed. He paid the penalty, hell, death, the grave, he paid it all for those who were in him, satisfying God's just commands upon you. His precious blood has redeemed you. That means you are not the property of the devil. The devil has no claim on you. You do not belong to him. The rest of mankind not in Jesus Christ, whoever is not in him, they belong rightfully to the devil. You do not. You've been redeemed. You belong to him. You belong to Jesus Christ.

You are his servant and him you must obey. You must obey. When he says do good works, the as obedient slaves, we do good works. We are his slaves. He's not commanding us something evil or onerous or something that is bad for us. Good works, as we'll see, will be a blessing. When he commands us, he has the right to command us. He's our Lord. He has redeemed us and he has delivered us from the power of sin and death.

The second part of that answer, the very next clause is that Jesus Christ having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Spirit after his own image. What does that mean to be renewed by the Spirit? Jesus Christ sends forth his Spirit into our hearts with a command. This is what I want you to do within the hearts of these people, to give them life. You regenerate them. You give them a life that they did not have from their first parents, the life that is my own life. Give them that life and then renew that heart. Fill that heart with the love of God so that that heart now is able to love God in return. Work on the will of that individual. That will is hard and stubborn and prone only to sin. Make that will to be soft. Make that will to be pliable. Make that will now want to choose that which is good, able to choose what is good. Work on the mind of that individual so that that mind is now spiritual, has the ability to understand spiritual things, the things of the word of God. That he sees the kingdom of heaven, he understands the truths of heaven and delights in them.

So astounding is this work of renewal that the Spirit does that we are transformed. We are now in the image of Jesus Christ, having righteousness as a part of our being, we who are totally unrighteous. We now have holiness. We are devoted to God and have a hatred for sin in us. We have a true knowledge of God that delights our souls. The Bible says you are a new creature. So radical is this change that Jesus Christ has made in you, you are a new creature. The old things are done away. The result of that is we do good works. We do good works. We bear fruit.

What kind of fruit do we bear? Well, we start with the most basic thing. In every single child of God, no matter how old, no matter how young, no matter what your circumstance, no matter how experienced you are as a Christian, the number one characteristic is this: the sorrow for sins. A sorrow for sin. You say to God, "I'm sorry," really meaning it from the heart. "I have offended God." A sorrow for sin. It means loving God. It means desiring to please him and to walk in his commandments. We desire that. This is God's purpose for establishing his covenant, that he may be glorified. That he may be glorified. That the covenant people will experience life with God and out of that experience of life with God, they will produce fruit, the fruit of good works. They will lift up their voices to praise him and with the whole of their lives, their being, they will show forth the power of Jesus Christ, what the Spirit has done. That affect on their lives will be evident day after day.

Good works are inseparable from the covenant not because they're the basis but because they're the fruit, the inevitable fruit of the covenant of grace. Because of that, there is within the heart and soul of a believer a desire to do good works. Everyone who is in that covenant life desires to do good works and that's amazing because, as we learned from the Catechism earlier, I am by nature prone to hate God. I'm prone to hate my neighbor. I'm prone to every possible iniquity that you could ever read about or hear about. I'm prone to that.

So where does the desire now to do good works come from? In the first place, it arises out of gratitude. Out of gratitude to God. Gratitude for what God has done for the fact that he has chosen me from all eternity, from the fact that he has redeemed me in the blood of Jesus Christ, that he has delivered me from the bondage of sin and from the corruption of sin. This is a tremendous thing. We were slaves to sin. We could do nothing but sin. The whole of our being is absolutely enslaved to it and just like everyone else in the world, we fulfill the lusts of the heart and of the mind and we ran in the paths of sin. This is what we are, we've been delivered from that. Satan, our cruel master, no longer has the power to rule over us. We are freed.

Every year, the United States has a celebration on July 4th or its Independence. The blacks of America have a celebration for their freedom from slavery. Israel had a yearly Passover to commemorate their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. How much more should we not have a celebration for our deliverance from the bondage of sin, that dreadful sin which means death, eternal death, unto life in Jesus Christ? That celebration is praise.

You say, "Well, how is that related to good works?" Well, good works are obedience to God and that's how we express gratitude, by obedience. Good works are those things, you recall, that are performed out of love for God in harmony with the commandments of God and for his glory. Out of love for God, in harmony with his commandments and for his glory. They are obedience to his law and that's how we express thankfulness. Children who receive everything from their parents and then walk in rebellion do not show thankfulness. Children who obey their parents are indicating, "I'm thankful for what my parents give me. I'm thankful. I demonstrate that by my obedience."

Believers want to show that. The Catechism says that, "that we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for his blessings." We want to do that. It isn't as if the law and the commandments and now the preaching Sunday after Sunday has to say, "Now, do good works! Do good works! Do good works!" Like a lash of a whip. It's coming out of our hearts. We want to do good works because we are thankful to God for the wonder of salvation. If we are not conscious of that, this is the dreadfulness of not preaching sin, of not seeing sins and confessing sins in our prayers. If we do not see the horrible depravity, if we do not see that from which we have been delivered, then we will not be very thankful. If we do not see the blessings that God has in store for us which we enjoy already now and which are coming in glory, then we will not be very thankful. If our mind and our thoughts are in the word of God and we are governed by that, we are a thankful people and we do that to show our thankfulness by obeying him. Good works.

In the second place, the good works and the desire to do good works rises out of the conscious experience of life with God; out of the very life that we have, our covenant life with God. This produces within us a desire to praise him. Let me illustrate that. If you could imagine for a moment living in the days of Solomon, if you were a good friend of Solomon and regularly, even daily, he would have you over to his house, you would be part of his court and sit there day after day, and you are, remember, his good friend and you have high regard for him to begin with, but as you sit there, you are more and more amazed at his wisdom, his justice, the riches of his kingdom, the power that this king has, and you are absolutely full of admiration for that king. Now, when you would go home at night, do you think that you would just forget about that? Would it not be true that for an hour or two every day at the supper table you would say, "Let me tell you what I heard today, what Solomon said, what he did. Two women came there with one child," and you'd tell the whole story and you would just be overflowing with admiration for the greatness of Solomon because you know him, because he's your friend, because you see his wisdom.

People of God, you live with someone far greater than Solomon. You live with God. And as you live with God, you experience his greatness, his wisdom, his astounding justice, his love for you, his goodness, and you can't keep quiet about it. You need to talk about it. You need to tell other people what you have experienced and if someone would criticize that God and even blaspheme that God, you would say, "Wait a minute, you don't know my God. Let me tell you about him. He is a God so great and glorious, I cannot stop praising him."

So how do you do that? Well, you can praise God directly or indirectly. Let's put it that way. First of all, you can praise him directly by speaking his words, using words in your prayers thanking God and extolling his greatness for what he has done for you. You can do that by talking to other people about what great things God has done, witnessing to other people. You have an answer ready always if someone asks you, "What's the reason for the hope that you have within you? Why are you living the way you are? What's so different about you?" You have a reason. You have an answer right away to tell them, "Because of the greatness of my God." You can sing. Singing brings out what's in your soul. It takes words and puts them to music and you can praise God with your words, directly extolling his virtues.

That's one way you praise him but there's another and that is by your life. By your life, indirectly, and that happens when in your life the power of his grace becomes manifest in your lives. The power of his grace becomes manifest in your lives. Again, that's why it's so important that last Question and Answer. These are the things that must be avoided. That you are an unchaste person full of vile thoughts and immorality. That you are an idolater, that you have another god that you worship instead of God. That you are an adulterer, unfaithful in your marriage. That you are a thief, stealing from someone. That you are a covetous man, always wanting what God has not given. That you are a drunkard, that you give yourself to drink day after day. That you are a robber or any such like. Those things are the very opposite of what should be coming out of our lives.

This is not what the Spirit has worked in you. The Spirit has worked holiness in you, that must therefore dominate in your life. That must put down all of these things. "Yes, all this is in me. All of these sins are there." The life of Jesus Christ must put that down. When that happens and then I live instead in obedience to God, it's the grace of God that is on display here. It's his power that I want people to see.

So we live as God's friends in every area of our life. When we're on the job, we're living as a friend of God in holiness. When we go to school, we are living as friends of God in holiness. Even when we're playing, there's something different about us. When we play, we're friends of God. That makes a difference in our lives. As we perform the duties of a husband toward our wives or of wives towards our husbands, as parents toward our children, there is something that comes out there of the grace of God. We are different. We are friends of God. We want the music that we listen to to praise him. We want the books that we read to give him praise. We want if any television is on, that any program that's on there will honor him. And that if we go on the internet, any site that we visit will praise him. It changes the way we live all our life. It's our desire that our lives will be sacrifices of praise to God. We are his friends.

So that desire arises out of gratitude for what God has done and out of the experience of living with God, knowing him, fellowshiping with him. We praise him. And what a blessing when we live in good works in the covenant. Blessing is found in the last part of Question and Answer 86, the last part. First of all, that each one of us may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof. The fruits of faith are good works. As a good, healthy, living, apple tree produces apples, so fruit, the fruit that is produced by faith, is

good works. They are good works and that is what happens. Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. You are connected to me." The connection we know theologically is faith. That's what unites us to Jesus Christ. "And everyone that is in me," said Jesus, "produces fruit." Good works.

When a believer sees good works in his life, then he is assured of his own faith. He knows the only source of that good work could be that he is connected to Jesus Christ. There is no other possibility. Out of me can only come vile iniquity, but out of that connection that I have to Jesus Christ flows good works. That gives me assurance. There are times when as a child of God we can lack that. That's a terrible state of being to be in. That one lacks the assurance that he is a believer. Good works, even that essential good work of repentance, of sorrow for sin says, "I am connected to Jesus Christ. I have faith in him." That's a blessing. That's a blessing to have assurance.

Of course, that's a two-edged sword, isn't it? Because what if you do not see good works in your life? What if you're not seeing them? Then you have no assurance, rather you have the testimony from God, "Your faith is dead." You talk about faith, you go to church but your faith is dead. Faith produces good works. Period. That's all there is to it. If you produce no good works, you have no faith. You may talk about doctrine, you may talk about the antithesis, you may argue the points, it doesn't matter. If you have no good works, you have no faith. It's empty.

The unbeliever, of course, that's absolutely true. He has no faith therefore produces only evil. But for a believer, if we do not see in our lives a life of good works not, "Oh well, yeah, last week, Thursday, let's see, the week before that..." A life of good works. If we do not see a life of good works, we ought to be alarmed. "There is something wrong with me spiritually. I need to repent. I need to be living with God. I need to be clinging to the cross and living a life of good works." But if we live in good works, God blesses that with assurance.

The second blessing that's given in this Question and Answer is: that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ. But that's a two-edged sword, too. If our lives do not produce good works, if we live in ungrateful wickedness and wallow in the sins of this world, if we are living godless and profane lives, that we cheat and lie and steal at will, and our mouths indicate no love for anyone around us, in our hearts we are eager to gossip and backbite against anyone, whether it's believer or unbeliever, then others will see that life, will hear those words, and they will be repelled by it. They will want nothing to do with that kind of person unless they are of the same kind and want to join in your wickedness. They know that we are supposed to be Christians, we call ourselves Christians, we go to church, members of a church, but if our lives are corrupt, they will blaspheme God. They will say, "If that's Christianity, I want nothing to do with it." I say they will never darken the door of your church if your lives and my life is immoral and profane. It will drive them away from the church, terrible judgment if we do that.

And on the other hand, good works can be the instrument that God uses to bring his people to the knowledge of the truth. Amazing. Yes, I know the preaching is the chief means of grace and we insist on that, we know that, but God can use a godly conversation to bring someone to that truth. Listen to what Peter wrote, 1 Peter 3:1, "Likewise, ye wives," we're talking about a wife now whose husband is an unbeliever. She was converted, he was no. What's Peter's admonition from the Spirit to that wife? "Be in subjection to your own husbands," submit yourselves to him. Show that you've put yourself under him, that you love him, that you honor him, that you're faithful to him. Put yourself under him, obey him with all due obedience as long as it is not contradictory to God. Why? "That, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives." The good conversation, the submission, the wife who is living a life of good works, fulfilling her duty before God toward her husband, can be an instrument that God uses to convert the husband and bring them to the truth.

Matthew 5:16 makes it broader to all of us, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and then glory your Father which is in heaven." Yes, that fellow believer will glorify that, the Father in heaven, but even others may be drawn, others may be drawn by a life of good works. God has used the lives of his people to bring others to a knowledge, to the knowledge of the truth, to a conviction.

Now, obviously if our lives will be that, if God will use our lives, our lives must be strikingly different from the world. If we are basically just a nice guy living on the street, well, I have a street full of nice guys. They're all nice so how am I different? My life has to be strikingly different from the ungodly. It has to be something that becomes out in our work, that we work differently. We're not pleasing men. We're not always complaining about the boss or the working conditions. We are here to please Jesus Christ and we love those who are around us and we love the employer for God's sake.

In our speech, it must be seasoned with grace, not cursing, not slandering, not backbiting but with grace and with the truth of God always there ready to be talked about. We're not missionaries on the job, I don't mean that, but in our life generally our speech must be seasoned with grace.

Our attitude must be contentment. Not seeking the things of this world, not living for materialism. Living for God just seeking these things that they may be used for the sake of the kingdom.

All our business dealings must be done honestly and with love for the neighbor. With love for the neighbor, not just the neighbors that I have in my employ, not just for me and my family, the neighbor that I'm working with right then and there. Love for the neighbor. I think one of the hardest things in the world is to be a businessman in this world, a Christian businessman, to love the neighbor as you sign a business agreement.

It will become evident in how we speak to our children that we are different. It will be evident as how our children speak back to our parents and how we talk about them when

they're not around. We're different. We speak differently. Those who are around us must be struck by the difference.

Now, of course, we all need to face the question: are they? Do they see something different in us? The answer is obviously they do not always see that. A life of good works, a life of good works, praising God, it isn't always there and that's why the commandment, the Catechism has to come to us with Question 86, "Why must we do good works?" Not it's a good idea, it should. Why must we do good works? Here comes the command: that God may be praised and that God may be glorified by the whole of our life. May he use, therefore, our life of good works, the gathering of his church for the glory of his holy name. Amen.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank thee for the word, for the commandments, and for the grace, the grace of the Holy Spirit that fills us and makes us want to do this, for apart from that work of the Spirit, there isn't anything in us that wants to obey. We are prone to sin. We thank thee, therefore, for the great work of Jesus Christ. Hold before us, O God, this must, this requirement, "Be a people zealous for good works." Amen.