

## God's Workmanship

By Rev. H. Hoeksema, begins with reading of the Lord's Day 32

Is conversion necessary? In other words, I can also say conversion onto good works, conversion necessary onto good works. On that I'll speak a moment, and first of all consider that it is proper for the Christian to do good works, secondly that good works are possible for the Christian, and then in the third place that good works bear their fruit for us and for all the church. Conversion necessary unto good works.

First of all, let us consider that good works are proper for the Christian. We have many, many passages in scripture that speak of the fact that the Christian, let us say, must walk in the way of good works and may not depart from that way of good works. Galatians 2 verse 20 is an instance of it because the apostle Paul, referring to himself, declares "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me"; that's why good works are possible for the Christian. The fact that Christ lives in us is a sign of the proof, of the basis, for our being able to do good works. Without Christ they cannot be done. And the apostle continues and says "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me". And that is also expressed very clearly and definitely in the Lord's Day to which I called your attention a moment ago. A very comprehensive and beautiful text concerning good works is, as you know, Ephesians 2. There you read the well-known words in verse 8 to 10, "but by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." And then in verse 10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them". That's beautiful. And that is at the same time all comprehensive. God saves us by grace. And because we are saved by grace; through that grace, as also the catechism has it here, we are not only redeemed, that is, we are not only purchased free from our sin and death, but we are also delivered, as the catechism has it. Because grace, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, moreover, another element: Christ also renews us by his Holy Spirit. Another reason why we are able to do good works: Christ renews us by his Spirit, still more, and he changes us after his own image; also, according to Scripture and according to the catechism here. And because that is the case, because we are redeemed and we are delivered and we are renewed; and renewed after the image of God by the Holy Spirit; therefore, it is possible for us to do good works, otherwise it would never be possible. And so in this beautiful text in Ephesians beloved, we are God's workmanship. In other words; God, by his abundant grace, has created us anew. Not only that, but we are so created in Christ Jesus, His workmanship in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Moreover, we are so created unto good works according to the text and according to all scripture. That was the very purpose of our being re-created, according to the text: unto good works. Still more, those good works, beloved, are ordained by God before, which, God has before ordained. That means that all that the Christian does, all the works which the Christian performs, are ordained by God from before the foundation of the world. Still more, it also means that every individual work which every individual in the blood of Christ does, is ordained by God. That we sit here, and that we are worshiping, is a good work. But beloved, I claim that the fact that we sit here in church, and that we sit here, as we sit here without exception; and that we pray and sing, as we do pray and sing, and that we proclaim and that we hear the gospel, the Word of God; still more, that every individual here according to his own capacity which God has given him by the Holy Spirit, causes us to worship as we are, here. And that's not only the case in regard to this present worship, but it is also the case with all our good works, whatever we do. How beautiful that will be, beloved, in glory don't you know? How beautiful it will be when all the members of the body of Christ, from the beginning of the world to the end, shall occupy his own place in that Body, and perform the works which God has before ordained for every individual member of the Body of Christ, don't you know? That, I think, is marvelous, a great marvel. And so, we go on, oh there's still more. Also in this text, God has ordained every work which the Christian may do and can do, in order that he may walk in those works; walk or cause me, all

that belongs to our active life. And God has ordained for every one of you to walk in our active life according to the grace and purpose of God. And so, I could go on but I mustn't.

Before I go on, I want to call your attention to the fact, beloved, that this Lord's Day is the beginning of the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism. The beginning of the third part. The first part speaks of sin and misery. The second part speaks of redemption. The third part speaks of gratitude, thankfulness. And that is all arranged according to the purpose and set-up of the whole catechism. The catechism, you must remember, is so beautiful and beautiful to preach on in connection with the Word of God; because it is a book that refers to the experiential life of the Christian. The catechism is not objective. If the doctrine of the catechism were objective, then we would have an entirely different order. Then we would not begin with sin and misery, but we would begin by the doctrine of God, then the doctrine of man, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of salvation, and the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the last things. But now the catechism is cast into a form that expresses the subjective experience of the Christian. And that, of course, is always in such a way that sin is first; mark you, I do not mean that sin is first in order of time. It isn't so that we are first conscious of sin; and then in another period, or the next period, we are conscious of our deliverance and redemption. And that finally we are conscious finally of gratitude. No, no, no, all three parts of the catechism are not consecutive, but simultaneous, don't you know? We are always sinful, and we are always, by the grace of God, conscious of our sin so that we are sorry for our sin. We are always conscious of the fact that we are redeemed by Christ, and that we are delivered by Christ. We are always conscious, too, of our gratitude to God for the deliverance. Not different periods but simultaneous, as long as we are in this world. As long as we are not in perfection. In heaven of course, I don't know whether we shall have remembrance of sin, most likely we will I think, but that's philosophy. We certainly will be conscious of the redemption of Christ, no question about that. But in heaven, beloved, we will be no more troubled by sin. Of course not, we are free forever more. But here, we're always troubled by sin. We're always full of reason to be sorry for sin and to seek forgiveness. But that is the order of the Heidelberg Catechism, beloved, and therefore we now come to the third part, the part of gratitude to God for all the work of salvation he has performed in us and for us. And therefore, the catechism from now on, after two introductory Lord's Days, will treat of the law of God, and finally we'll treat of prayer.

And now we have one of the introductory parts, and the introductory part treats of 'must we do good works, why must we do good works?' And you must remember beloved, that the catechism in the first question and answer speaks of good works in the positive sense of the word. But in the next question and answer it speaks of those that walk in sin. That's the question and answer 87, "cannot they then be saved who continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?" Mind you, can they be saved? And the answer is negative. And the answer is from scripture, for the holy Scripture declares that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous, drunkard, slanderer, robber or any such like, shall enter the kingdom of God. So, in the first place don't be discouraged by all the sins that are mentioned here. You know, I could say, I am all this too, I am. Maybe you think that I'm not, but I am; and not only that, but you are too, you are too. You are an unchaste person, you are [an] idolater, you are [an] adulterer, thief, robber, covetous man, drunkard and so on. You are. But that is not the question of the Heidelberg Catechism. That isn't the meaning of the question, and of the answer, which the Heidelberg Catechism here goes. We all have sins. As long as we are in this life, we have but a small beginning of the new obedience and all the rest is corrupt. That's not the question.

But beloved, the question is do you walk in those sins? Do you love those sins? Do you practice those sins consciously, so that you do not glorify God but glorify the devil? That isn't you, is it? It isn't I; it isn't I. I don't boast because there's nothing to boast of anyway. If we boast, we boast in God. And in God I may boast, and you may boast too. In God, through Christ, we boast. We boast and say 'no I'm not an idolater, I'm not a robber, not a thief, I'm not an adulterer, I'm not an unchaste person; I am not'. When I boast I say not that, 'I am good', but; that, 'God is good in me and only through Jesus Christ my Lord', that's all. And therefore beloved, mind you, anyone that walks in those sins cannot enter into the

kingdom of God. Why not? Because, beloved, he is not in the kingdom. He is outside of the kingdom. He is not dead to sin. He is not dead in Christ, and he has not risen with Christ. Because, if he was dead to sin, and dead in Christ, and dead in the spiritual sense of the word, not *in* sin and misery, but dead *to* sin and misery, he would not walk in those sins; but now he does. And therefore, we must remember, when in this Lord's Day, we speak of good works; and of the question 'why' we must do good works, this is not of ourselves. We do not boast, because we do no good works of ourselves, but we do good works only in Christ Jesus. To Him alone be all the glory. That's what this Lord's Day teaches us beloved, and what the whole Bible teaches without exception. And now let's ask, even though it comes in the next Lord's Day, we probably can better ask the question and answer it now: what are good works? And how can the Christian perform those good works? And in the next catechism, in the next Lord Day, you have the answer that good works are those that are according to the will and law of God, and to his glory, and that's true. But this morning, I want to have a slightly different viewpoint. And therefore, I would say, that good works are surely those that are rooted in the love of God. The love of God. And when I speak of the love of God in this connection, I mean our love to God, not God's love to us; although that of course is the basis even of our love to God; but nevertheless, when we speak of good works, then we must maintain that all good works must be motivated by the love of God; all the rest is vain.

All kinds of errors also in regard to the good works of the Christian; there is the Antinomian, the one that is against the law, literally speaking. The one that despises good works. The one that claims that as long as he is in the world, he cannot do any good works anyway, so why try! The one that claims beloved, that because he, by nature is still dead in sin and misery, cannot do good works, and therefore he simply walks in sin; he does. That's Antinomianism, against the law.

And there is of course Pelagianism. Pelagianism has it that man, by nature, is able to do good works. He may stumble, he may fall, but by nature he is good enough to do good works if he wants to. That's Pelagianism.

There is beloved, the well-known Pharisee, Phariseeism. Phariseeism has it that good works in relation to God are tit for tat. God does something, and because he does something, the Pharisee does something too. Good works by nature, that's abominable, beloved. Abominable in the sight of God. If a man works for wages, and if on Saturday night the boss hands him his money, his wages; both the boss and the man that received the wages, is free. The boss cannot complain and he cannot complain. And so is really Phariseeism. The Pharisee works for wages in relation to God. He says to God, 'I do this and I do that, I pray, I fast, I do all kinds of good works; now you reward me, I want my reward. I want eternal life; you are obliged to give me eternal life for all the good things I do'. I say once more, that is abominable in the sight of God.

No, if we do really good works, beloved, it must be purely motivated by the love of God, all the rest is abominable to God. Or if you want to do it a little differently, our good works must be motivated by being desirous to be pleasing to God. All the rest is dirt. All the rest is wicked, nothing else. If you do something, and if you do something that may be called good, then you do something beloved; and not only that is outwardly according to the will of God, but you do something that, in your heart, you want to be pleasing to God. That's the principle of good works. And that is possible only for the Christian. And as I said, and as the catechism has it, that is possible 1) because God has redeemed us; God is first, always first, His part is first and last. God has redeemed us. God had purchased us free, that's one thing. Secondly, God has delivered us. Delivered us from sin and death. That's why we can do good works. Thirdly, God has so delivered us, according to the catechism and according to this Lord's Day, that we are renewed. And fourthly, we are so renewed that we are transformed again according to the image of God. We know God, know him spiritually. Yes, we love him. We walk in holiness and righteousness, and all the rest, if we do good works. That therefore, is the possibility of doing good works, all right.

But remember that even this does not mean beloved, that God has redeemed us, which is true; that God has delivered us, once for all; that God has renewed us spiritually, all true; that God has changed us into the image of Christ, into his own image, into knowledge, righteousness and holiness, all true; but

remember, that also must mean beloved, that God does so continually. Don't you forget it. If you are to do good works; then, if it is so: that God has redeemed us and now it's finished, God's work is finished; that God has delivered us, and that's finished; and God has regenerated us, and that is finished; and God has called us, and that is finished; oh, no! Good works beloved, are principally good works of Christ, not of man. Oh, don't misunderstand me, I know very well, our works are ours, we work, sure; but this, as the apostle Paul has it here in the text which I try to explain, and as the epistle to the Philippians has it too beloved; God works within us to will and to do of His good pleasure. He does that in Christ. And as God works within us to will and to do of his good pleasures, we work out our own salvation. God works within us in Christ Jesus our Lord. And, when Christ works in our hearts, beloved, then we can work it out; then we can do good works; in no other way, that must be the manner.

Well, I'm at the end of my rope again, as far as the time is concerned. But let me just say a few words about the fruit that the catechism mentions. And the fruit according to the catechism is twofold. There is that by my good conversation, I may become assured of my faith. And secondly, that I might gain others to Christ. Now first of all, according to the latter idea, we must remember that if we gain any man to Christ; first he must be elect, no other. Christ did not die for all men as was the contention of one the papers in the Christian Reformed Church. Christ died only for the elect. And if through our godly conversation anyone can be gained to Christ, that one must be the elect one of election, no one else. You say we don't know the elect, that's not necessary, not necessary at all. We only walk in love before God and have a godly conversation; and God will take care that the elect, by means even of our godly conversation, will come to him to pray, don't worry about that. But secondly, that godly conversation beloved, is not only a walk, I mean our active life; but also, is our word. We speak, we speak like a child of God. We rebuke the wicked. We speak of God's grace. We speak of the forgiveness of sins. We speak of the redemption in Christ to our neighbor. And secondly, not only our actual walk, but also our word is used by God to call his elect children, the neighbor, to Christ. Thirdly, and don't forget this either, that it is mostly those that are in our immediate surroundings. First of all, and mostly, mostly in the first place our family, our children, they must be drawn to Christ. And by the godly conversation of the parents, they will be drawn to Christ. The church, the congregation, the brother and the brethren and sisters; yes, they, they. In the first place, that does not exclude anyone that walked in the world as an unbeliever; no, but nevertheless I think that those that are in our immediate surroundings are first; and God will draw them first too, by our godly conversation and walk.

Now a word about that assurance of our faith. I would say to be brief beloved, that that means chiefly that the assurance, our assurance of our faith, is continuous. I don't know how to express myself differently. It means beloved, that our assurance does not come by any calculation, we do not say to a person 'I've done this and I've done that, I've done this good work and that good work and now I'll be sure', oh no. That comes continuously; that first of all. If we walk in the way of life, if we do good works, if we perform the good works which God has ordained for us beloved, the certainty of our faith is continuously ascertained. That is the main thing. And therefore, it does not mean that our faith becomes sure; oh no, faith is sure, faith is always sure. Faith is a certain knowledge and a hearty confidence, always. But it means that when we walk in the way of good works, when we walk in the way pleasing to God; then, and really then alone, we are sure that we are in the faith. That we are in the faith. And that assurance is blessed. And I pray beloved, oh I pray for myself and I pray for you; and I pray to you, walk worthy of the calling wherewith God has called you and bear the fruit of those good works. Amen