

“Good Works - Salvation - Faith”

Lord Jesus, grant me your Spirit that I would proclaim your word in Truth and Power and that all who listen would hear what you have to say to them. To the glory of the heavenly Father. Amen.

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:12f. The last sermon here, I mentioned those who selected the lessons omitted the beginning of the Epistle lesson perhaps because they felt it was out of harmony with our present day ideas.

By the way, It was a group of scholars from many major denominations that selected the lessons, ancient selections had major influence. Still this week the omission in James is intriguing. They did leave in the central idea of the section. “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ... So faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

That we are saved by Faith alone and not by good works is a flag waving slogan of the Protestant Reformation. They claimed with good reason that the Roman Church of their day talked and acted by the principal that we are saved by doing certain good works which were beneficial to the church.

Satan and our devious human hearts replaced the old error with a false understanding of the truth. So today many say, act, as if: “Since we are saved by faith and not by good works as long as we believe in Jesus we are free from the commandments and can do whatever we want.” Some of the most evil people I have known were confident they are saved.

You may have talked with people who were zealous about the idea you must be absolutely certain you are eternally saved. No matter what, you can not lose your salvation. They quote Bible Verses that make that claim. They do not quote other Bible Verses that are a warning about false confidence. For many the assurance of salvation is a primary doctrine.

You can be certain nothing, no one, not even Satan can snatch you out of God’s hand. That does not mean you can not choose to leave God behind. In fact

you do not even have to leave the Christian Church to lose your salvation.

“Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall.” “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!” The Bible is full of examples of people who appeared to be on God's side and end up rejected. Being conceited about your salvation, looking down on the sinners is antagonistic to the will of God.

“Speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” We are surrounded by harsh merciless voices, condemning evil sinners. Beating people down has always been known as a way to make them worse. Attacking those who disagree with you just turns them into enemies.

I understand foolish people with limited understanding do think and act those ways. I am disturbed, dismayed, when leaders, great spokesmen encourage, promote ways that lead to further destruction. Especially when they are claiming to be Christians, promoting the will of God. I recently read the following:

“As the more politically conservative segments of various American churches have moved away from the teachings of Christ – caring for the poor, justice for the disenfranchised, love and grace – and politicized the faith in order to maintain a status quo that is distinctively racist, sexist and classist, Christianity has essentially repelled many people who it might have influenced a century ago.

Sadly, Christianity and many of its American adherents are floundering and gasping for air in a sea of irrelevance, held down by the weight of our own arrogance and our indifference to non-believers. If we don't return to the foundations of Christ's teaching by being more actively and compassionately involved in serving those in need, if we don't get back to being the vessel through which others in society experience God's amazing love and grace by risking our reputations on behalf of those who are suffering and those who have been disenfranchised by injustice, we will drown in that sea with – dare I say it – God's permission.”

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also

faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. . . .
has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to
be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has
promised to those who love him? But you have dis-
honored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who
oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?
Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable
name by which you were called?

I do not think I can hold myself up before you as
an exemplar of good works deeds of compassion.

Luther and his early followers were accused of
attacking doing good works by proclaiming salvation
was by faith alone. It was an accusation they had to re-
fute. In the first Lutheran Document, The Augsburg
Confession 1530 before the Holy Roman Emperor they
stated. Article XX: Of Good Works. “Our teachers are
falsely accused of forbidding Good Works. For their
published writings on the Ten Commandments, and
others of like import, bear witness that they have
taught . . . what works in every calling be pleasing to
God.

Furthermore, it is taught on our part that it is
necessary to do good works, not that we should trust
to merit grace by them, but because it is the will of

God. . . . And because through faith the Holy Ghost is
received, hearts are renewed and endowed with new
affections, so as to be able to bring forth good works.
For Ambrose says: Faith is the mother of a good will
and right doing.”

Luther in his Small Catechism did something in-
teresting with his explanations of the 10 Command-
ments. When you look at the whole Bible you realize
they are not just a list of things not to do but there are
clear words about what we are to do. Listen with new
ears to the ten commandments. They mean:

“but give our parents honor, serve, obey, and
hold them in love and esteem.

but help and befriend our neighbor in every bodi-
ly need in every need and danger of life and body.

and each love and honor his spouse.

but help our neighbor to improve and protect his
property and business that his means are preserved
and his condition is improved.

but defend our neighbor, think and speak well of
him, and put the best construction on everything.

but help and be of service to our neighbor in
keeping his house.

but urge spouse, servants, animals to stay and
diligently do their duty.

But He promises grace and every blessing to all that keep these commandments. Therefore we should also love and trust in Him, and gladly do zealously and diligently our whole life according to His commandments.”

The first three commandments go like this. We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. but call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

but hold His Word sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.

That is a very different way to think about the commandments. I am sure you understand when Luther says neighbor he means every human being of every nation, tribe and language. All God created.

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Usually we talk about the commandments as if they are there to make us guilty. Part true. Instead look at them as a guide to how we are to live. What does God want us to do? People shrug their shoulders when you ask them that. They don't know. Pray? That's true but the Bible has all kind of instruction on what an how God want His redeemed to live. Lives that bring Him praise and joy.

God has given you love, victorious love beyond all understanding, you are held in His hands, your heart and mind are kept in Christ Jesus Amen.

15 S after Pentecost

Isaiah 35:4–7a

James 2:1–10, (11-13) 14–18

Sept 6, 2015

460, 294, 312

Sept 20, 2015

Ps

Mark 7:(24–30) 31–37

Living Water Rosedale

Hymns:

Berea HC

FAITH ALONE / GOOD WORKS

It is an idea and practice of some that since they know “Salvation is by Faith Alone”, they are freed from keeping the Commandments.

That we are saved by “Faith Alone” does not render obedience to God’s Law optional. The following quotes from Lutheran Confessions makes this clear. Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: The Eighth Commandment. “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. What does this mean?--Answer. We should fear and love God that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.”

It is God’s will that we do good. Even if we refrain from doing evil, no one is ever able to do all the good he should. Although we are unable to perfectly do everything, we must still diligently do our best.

Creed: The First Article. “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. What does this mean?--Answer. I believe that God has made me and all creatures; . . . without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I owe it (it is my duty) to Him to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true.”

The Augsburg Confession: Article XX: Of Good Works. “Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding Good Works . . . Furthermore, it is taught on our part that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should trust to merit grace by them, but because it is the will of God.”

The Smalcald Articles written by Luther states Part III, Article IX. Of Excommunication. “manifest and obstinate sinners are not admitted to the Sacrament . . . until they amend their lives and avoid sin.” Manifest = publicly known. Obstinate = refuse to repent, apologize, amend, correct.

That we are saved by “Faith Alone” is perfectly valid. That does not mean anyone can decide on the basis of his own opinion of himself that he has “sufficient faith” to guarantee his salvation. God alone is the Judge. The only opinion of himself, a Christian can have, is that he is a sinner unworthy of God’s mercy. As such all he can do is hope, have faith, in Jesus as his Redeemer. That hope means of necessity he will seek God’s Spirit, repent, amend and strive to live as one of the redeemed of the Lord. Anyone who thinks his place is heaven is assured, has put himself in place of God. As St. Paul said “work out your salvation with fear and trembling”. God is good. We can be confident in Him. It is ourselves of whom we need to be in constant fear. Pride, confidence goes before the fall. The Good News of redemption is good news to be believed, the foundation for a living hope. Rejoice in the Love of God and pass it on. To God alone is the glory.

To hear is to obey / To believe is to do.

This was sent with the Concord Ministry letter to inmates and families.

Stephen H. Funck