

Yarrow, September 5, 2010

Ps 103:1,2  
 Hy 1A  
 Ps 71:6,7,8  
 Hy 24:6  
 Hy 37:3,4  
 Eph 2:1-10  
 Romans 6:1-14  
 1 Peter 3:1-7  
 Lord's Day 32

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Lord's Day 32 begins with a statement. Take away the opening word 'since' and the closing question, and you have this statement: "We have been delivered from our misery by grace alone through Christ, without any merit of our own." That statement catches neatly and concisely the glorious gospel we've confessed in the previous Lord's Days, the gospel of salvation by grace alone. The emphasis lies on the word 'alone'; the Lord has granted us forgiveness of sins and life eternal without any contribution from our side. Free, grace.

That reality automatically prompts the question about good works. If forgiveness of sins and peace with God are God's gifts of grace, freely granted to us without contribution from our side, *why must we yet do good works?* They contribute nothing, so why bother with them?

Actually, the question is a bit stronger. The question is not: *why ought we yet to do good works?* The question is: "*why must we yet do good works?*" It's an obligation, a duty, a *must*. And to be honest, brothers and sisters, that raises our hackles somewhat. Salvation is free, by grace alone. Back in Lord's Day 24.64 we confessed that good works *cannot but follow* God's gift of salvation as expression of gratitude. Is it then not overdone to speak in Lord's Day 32 of '*must*'?

No, brothers and sisters, it is not overdone. The duty of our Lord's Day is part and parcel of the grace of Jesus Christ. We *must* do good works because of Christ in grace has renewed us. Once we see that point, two blessed results follow, one with regards to ourselves and the other with respect to the neighbour.

I summarize the sermon with this theme:

## **CHRIST'S GRACE MAKES US DO GOOD WORKS.**

1. The divine cause of good works.
2. The personal comfort of good works.
3. The neighbourly benefit of good works.

### ***1. The divine cause of good works.***

The gospel of deliverance through the blood of Jesus Christ comes at no cost to ourselves, is by grace alone. But how far, brothers and sisters, does grace extend? What is caught under the concept of 'grace'?

Grace. We hear in the term the notion that the Lord Jesus Christ has shed His blood for sinners. With His self-sacrifice on Calvary our sins are washed away so that we are righteous before God. It's the material we confessed in previous Lord's Days. I think of Lord's Day 23: God freely imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteous and holiness of Christ so that He sees me

as without sin. I think of the sacrament of holy baptism (Lord's Day 26,27): as water washes away dirt from the body, so Christ's blood washes away the dirt of my soul. It's also the gospel driven home in Lord's Supper (Lord's Day 28ff): the broken bread and shed blood signify the broken body and shed blood of the Saviour; He gave His blood to ransom us from Satan's power and return us to God as His children and heirs. Freely, by grace, our sins are washed away so that we are righteous before God, have peace with God. This is called *Justification*.

This gospel of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ is the gospel of grace. But the thing is: this gospel of justification is not the *sum-total* of the gospel; it's only *one aspect* of God's gracious work! You see: God in the beginning created us to be perfect, alive, able to image God. With the fall into sin and our joining Satan we *died* (say the Scriptures, Eph 2:1), became so depraved that we were able only to sin. That is: instead of imaging the Lord our Maker we imaged Satan our destroyer. With our fall in Paradise we provoked God's wrath; with our continuing daily sins we continue to provoke His wrath.

In His grace the Lord God through Jesus' blood ransomed us from Satan's bondage and returned us to God's side so that we're righteous before Him, have forgiveness of sins; it's called Justification. But *does the Saviour leave us dead in sin?* Does He take us, spiritual carcasses, back from Satan's side to God's side (justification) and *let us continue to be spiritual carcasses, dead in sin?* No, brothers and sisters, He does not! Says Paul to the Ephesians: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)..." (2:4f). Notice: we were dead but God in Christ "made us alive". Becoming alive again is not our work but God's work – just as much as paying for sin is not our work but God's work. More: this being made alive is, says Paul, is distinctly God's *grace*. The apostle says in Eph 2 that "by grace you have been saved", and his reference is not to the work of Christ in shedding His blood to make us righteous before God; in this passage his reference is to the work of the Lord in regenerating us, making us alive again. It needs to be fixed in our minds: God's grace in Christ is not just that our sins are forgiven, that we are righteous before God, that we are taken from Satan's side back to God's side; *that's only half the picture*. God's grace in Christ is also that we are changed, are made alive, are renewed – and that's called *Sanctification*. Justification and sanctification *both* are God's work in us, *both* are His gifts of 'grace' for us and in us.

Allow me an illustration to clarify. You've got very sweet memories of a 1968 Camaro, and you'd love to drive one again. You've found one, but the engine has long ceased, the mice have long ago finished the seats, the windows have long ago been smashed; it's an empty body, an automotive carcass – dead. But you pay the price, so that this wreck of a Camaro is now yours. So you bring the thing home, and set it in your shed; it's *yours*. That's justification: though we're spiritual carcasses Christ has paid the price for us and brought us home; we *belong* again in Father's house, are acceptable before God.

Yet we all understand that you didn't buy the car in order to leave it in your shed as a wreck. The buying is the one half of the story; the other half is that you want to restore it, make it look like new, drive it again. That, beloved, is sanctification, the other half of God's grace in Christ. He not only bought us, redeemed us, brought us back to the Father; He also restores us, renews us, makes us alive again. The two are different, buying the car and restoring it, justification and sanctification. But you can't separate the two! As buying the car without restoring it is a job half done, so justification without sanctification is a job half done. Grace is the *whole* package!

If grace is *both*, is justification *and* sanctification, a consequence follows. When I speak about this '68 Camaro, we all understand that buying the wreck does not mean that the wreck is instantly restored, drivable again; that can take months of hard work. Indeed, it is possible that the car sits in our shed as an automotive carcass for years before we get around to restoring it.

But the renewing work of our Lord Jesus Christ occurs *at the same time* as His delivering us from Satan's power. I remind you of Eph 2: "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..." Notice here the *tense* the apostle uses. "We were dead," and now *are made alive*. Being alive is a *present reality*, says Paul; it's not something the Lord *will do to us* when He has time some day down the track. The apostle says the same thing in Romans 6. "Shall we," he asks in vs 1, "shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" "Certainly not," he answers, and then gives as explanation the fact that we already have "newness of life" (vs 4). Vs 11: "reckon yourselves to be dead indeed (with respect) to sin, but *alive (with respect) to God in Christ Jesus our Lord*." The renewing, restoring work of the Lord is not something of the future, but it's something the child of God receives at the same time as he is made righteous in Jesus' blood.

We say of ourselves that we are righteous before God, have forgiveness of our sins; that's the statement we make in Q 86. But then, beloved, we also have to dare to say the second half, need also to acknowledge that we are new creatures, spiritually alive, no longer a wrecked Camaro but restored and drivable! It is the emphasis of Scripture: those who are righteous before God through Jesus' blood are *also renewed* through Jesus' Spirit! You can't separate the two, and so must dare to acknowledge both as true for ourselves; it's how we have to look at ourselves and it's how we need to speak of each other – as renewed people, restored Camaros!

I say here nothing new. Page back with me for a moment to Lord's Day 26. We're all baptized. Now then: "How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?" Answer: "Christ instituted this outward washing and with it gave the promise that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly His blood and Spirit wash away the impurity of my soul, that is, all my sin." Notice the reference here to *both* Christ's blood *and* His Spirit. Hence the next question: "What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?" That first part, to "be washed with Christ's blood," is easy enough. A 70: "to be washed with Christ's blood means to receive forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, because of Christ's blood, poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross." That's the matter of justification, being righteous, having forgiveness of sins through Jesus' blood. But that second, to be washed with His Spirit: what's that mean? Says A 70 further: "to be washed with His Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life." Notice: to be washed with Christ's Spirit is the notion of being *renewed*, of being *made alive*, being *restored*. No, the restoration is not perfect; we're not a brand new Camaro again. But we're restored nevertheless, drivable again.

That, beloved, is how we need to see ourselves! We must look at ourselves not simply as persons who are righteous before God and forgiven of our sins on account of Jesus' blood; we must see ourselves as changed, as renewed, as restored through the working of Jesus' Spirit!

So we can come back to the question of the beginning. "Why *must* we do good works?" Is the 'must' not overdone, not too strong a word? No, beloved, it's not. *Christ* has done a work in us, He's restored us through His Holy Spirit, and so we need to *make a point of acting restored*.

Here's where the analogy with the Camaro falls apart. No matter how far you've restored your car, it still can't *do* anything; *you* still have to drive it. But a restored sinner *can* do

something! God created us in the beginning with the responsibility to image Him, and –despite our fall into sin– God has continued to hold us to that responsibility. Now that God has renewed us through His Holy Spirit we are *made able* to carry out again the responsibility God gave us in the beginning *and therefore we have the duty to act according to that responsibility*. That’s the instruction of the apostle in Romans 6:12: you are alive to God in Christ Jesus, and “*therefore,*” he says, “do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” The *command* not to let sin be boss in your life follows consistently on the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. You are made alive, restored, renewed? Then you *must* do good works, have the *duty* to do good works. Is it a burden to do good works? No, it’s not a burden – though sin remains in us and keeps encouraging us to act according to the will of the flesh; there’s a struggle involved here, indeed (cf Rom 7). And that’s exactly why we need to have our *responsibility* in the matter laid before us time and again. We *must* do good works simply because Christ has renewed us. We *must* do good works, and so show our gratitude for the grace God has given in giving us both justification and sanctification, in both ransoming us from Satan’s power through Christ’s blood *and* restoring us through Christ’s Spirit. That’s Lord’s Day 32: we *must* do good works “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.” We *must* do good works because *Christ has made us able to do them*.

That brings us to our second point:

## **2. The personal comfort of good works.**

Our Lord’s Day mentions a second reason why we are to do good works. “Further,” says A 86, “that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits.”

The key word here is ‘assured’. Yet the assurance is not about whether there actually is a God in heaven, nor about whether the Bible is really true. In the Catechism it is the *believer* who speaks, and so the existence of God and the truth of His Word is taken for granted. But in the life of the true believer, of the person justified by Jesus’ blood and renewed by Jesus’ Spirit, there remain from time to time those moments of doubt (for we’re not perfect yet). The fine point of the doubt is this: are my sins really forgiven? Notice: the question is not whether I believe that God forgives sins in general; the question is whether God actually forgives *my* sins. It’s something with which every one of us, at some time or other, struggles. We recall a particular evil deed on our part, or we experience some calamity in our lives, or we approach the day of death, and the question floods over us: are *my* sins really forgiven? Does God actually see *me* as righteous? It’s in that context that the catechism speaks of being “assured of our faith by its fruits.”

How this works? Let’s go back to the Camaro. The fact that the Camaro rolls out of your garage all restored and sparkling says something about the car’s ownership. You don’t spend hours and hours restoring what you have not bought in the first place. More, the restoration demonstrates what you think of that Camaro; this machine is your pride and joy. So too the Christian. Because of our fall into sin we once belonged to Satan, were His property. With the price of His precious blood our Saviour bought us, ransomed us from Satan’s power, and returned us to God – so that we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God. The proof that He bought us? This: He *restored us*. He has given us His Spirit to change us, to renew us, to make us alive again. *For Christ does not renew those whom He has not ransomed*, does not restore cars He hasn’t bought. Justification and sanctification belong together! Do you want proof, then, that you really belong to Christ, have forgiveness of sins, are righteous before God? The evidence lies in the renewal of your life, lies in the fact that you are alive to God, do good works. Those good

works: they provide *assurance* that you really belong to God; by the fruits you produce, the good works you do, you receive assurance of your faith.

No, not that we have to look for perfect fruits in ourselves. A peach with a scab isn't perfect, but it's a peach nevertheless and evidence that the tree in question is truly a peach tree. The works we do are far from perfect, but –by the grace of the Lord– are good works nevertheless (and next week we'll find out exactly what good works are – Lord's Day 33)– and therefore evidence of what kind of tree we are – whether still a Camaro wreck or restored. So: whilst we pursue perfection, we need not achieve perfection in ourselves before we can conclude that we are restored by the Holy Spirit – and therefore also washed by Jesus' blood.

That conclusion, brothers and sisters, has a second side to it. What about those members of the church –they've made profession of faith, attend the table of the Lord, are maybe even esteemed members of the church community– who fail to produce good works? What must one think of those whose external behaviour conforms to God's revealed will, but they keep a closet sin? Here's Question & Answer 87: such persons are "ungrateful". Though the Lord comes to them with the promises of the gospel –be it in the sacrament of baptism in their infancy, be it in the preaching Sunday by Sunday, be it even in the sacrament of holy Supper from time to time– they do not demonstrate that they've been restored by the Holy Spirit *and therefore they may not conclude that the Lord has redeemed them with His blood*. Since they've not been redeemed, they remain in bondage to Satan – and therefore cannot be saved. That's A 87: "no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, greedy person, drunkard, slanderer, robber or the like shall inherit the kingdom of God." The fruits of renewal are external only, the evidence of being restored through the work of the Holy Spirit turns out to be but a veneer covering up a love for sin, and therefore one cannot claim to be redeemed by Jesus' blood. So there is no forgiveness of sins, there is no peace with God. Justification and sanctification –though two different things– cannot be separated. That is why there is need for repentance.

Here is a warning for us. Question & Answer 87 does not speak in first instance about unbelievers, those outside the church who live in their sins. Question & Answer 87 speaks first of all about persons *inside* the church, persons who have tasted the goodness of God, but remain *ungrateful* for God's gifts. So we need to examine ourselves: do I permit pornography in my life – I'm an unchaste person? Do I place my trust in my money or my talents to carry me through my troubles – I'm a closet idolater? Do I keep a secret affair with a secretary at work – I'm an adulterer? Do I skim company profits for myself – I'm a thief? Do I insist on more and more comforts for myself – I'm a greedy person? Do I need my bottle before I go to bed – I'm a drunkard? Do I pass on twisted or damaging information about another – I'm a slanderer? We don't like such self-examination, but it's so important; such persons can exist in the congregation of Jesus Christ, and yet will not be saved! We do good works so that we can be assured of our faith by its fruits. But the argument cuts the other way too; where we do good works in public, but keep secret sins on the side, the public may draw one conclusion *but we shall have to draw the other one* – and repent before it is too late.

I come to our last point:

### **3. The neighbourly benefit of good works.**

Our Lord's Day mentions, briefly, a third reason why we must do good works. The third 'must' is driven by concern for the neighbour. In the world in which we live, there are so few people who are eager to hear the gospel; most have chosen not to go to church and chosen not to read a Bible. Yet these people will not be saved unless they come to faith in Jesus Christ. If they

are not open to hearing about the gospel, how shall they come to know the gospel? This is the concern of the last part of A 86: “that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ.”

We read that passage from 1 Peter 3. The passage addresses wives who have come to faith but their husbands have not. The instruction of the apostle is this: “Wives, ... be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct...” (vss 1f). That wives “be submissive to [their] own husbands” is a command of Scripture for all times and places. Doing good works includes that we obey the law of the Lord. By doing good works, by being submissive to her husband, the believing wife shows her unbelieving and hostile husband not just that she’s the property of Jesus Christ but also that her Saviour has renewed her, restored her. Demonstrating that she is restored, and no longer living in sin, is a powerful argument for an unbeliever to think again about the value of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the point: to make such an unbeliever jealous of what the Lord has given – and so come to believe also. This principle is valid for all of us in every aspect of our lives.

Why *must* we yet do good works? We’re saved by grace, without contribution from our side. Now that the Lord has both redeemed us *and* restored us, good works are *possible* and *therefore obligatory*; the Lord wants us to *be* what we *are*. The consequence is rich; as restored Camaros we are ourselves assured that we really belong to our faithful Saviour because of the restoring work He did on us, and the neighbour also is made to see something of the power and love of the Great Restorer.