

The Place of Good Works in the Covenant

Heidelberg Catechism

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Our Scripture reading this morning is Ephesians 2. We will read just the first 10 verses of the chapter and pay attention especially to the tenth verse, really 8 through 10 but especially 10 as it looks at the matter of good works which is what the Lord's Day we consider concentrates on this morning. Ephesians 2, the first 10 verses.

1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

So far we read God's holy word.

The basis of this and many other passages of the word of God is the instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 24. It would be good to keep the Catechism open for a little while this morning as we see the connection between the two Lord's Days, 23 and 24, but we read Lord's Day 24 at this time.

Q. 62. But why cannot our good works be the whole, or part of our righteousness before God?

A. Because, that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.

Q. 63. What! Do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?

A. The reward is not of merit, but of grace.

Q. 64. But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

A. By no means: for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

Beloved, in the Lord Jesus Christ this Lord's Day cannot be separated from the previous Lord's Day which we considered a few weeks ago, it follows directly from Lord's Day 23. Recall that Lord's Day 23 sets forth the doctrine of justification by faith alone. That's the main doctrine of Lord's Day 23. That's evident from Question 59, "But what doth it profit thee now that thou believeth all this?" And the Answer, "That I am righteous in Christ. That I am righteous in Christ before God and an heir of eternal life." And then Question 60, "How art thou righteous before God?" And the Answer, "Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ." That's how I am righteous, only by a true faith. And Question 61 then says, "Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?" So it is emphasizing that idea that we are righteous by faith, by faith alone. It's the only way you can be righteous is by faith in Jesus Christ.

Lord's Day 24 continues the same discussion of righteousness by faith alone and that's evident from Question 62, "But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?" We are righteous by faith alone, what about our good works? Why cannot our good works be at least a little bit of the righteousness before God? Why cannot that be true? And this Lord's Day will absolutely shut the door on any place for works being our righteousness before God, even in the slightest amount. That's what this Lord's Day does.

Our righteousness is a very important concept in the covenant. Extremely important. Let me explain why. Righteousness is inseparable from life. Righteousness and life. Let me demonstrate that from just a couple of passages in the Bible, looking at Proverbs. Proverbs 11:19 says this, "As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." Righteousness tendeth to life. Or again, Proverbs 12:28. Proverbs 12:28 says, "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death." In that path there is no death. The way of righteousness is life. Those two things go together. But true life is living with God, fellowshiping with God. That's life, knowing God and enjoying life with God. That's life.

It's a life that Adam lost. When Adam fell into sin, he lost the life of joy and fellowship that he had with God. Why? Because he became guilty with his sin, he became unrighteous, and the punishment for his guilt and unrighteousness is death and corruption, and every sin that Adam would commit then would put a greater distance between God and himself and he would remove himself from life and fellowship with God. God thrust him out of the garden. God closed the way to the tree of life. He had no right to that any longer because of his guilt. But if a man who is guilty is brought into the state of righteousness, there is nothing that bars him from coming into the presence of God. There is no sin that prohibits him. There is no curse of God on him. God does not take a man who is righteous and thrust him out, God draws a man who is righteous to himself because God delights in righteousness. So you see how important it is that you be righteous if you are to have life with God, fellowship with God. Righteousness is very much a part of the covenant because the covenant is life, a life of friendship and fellowship with God.

In this Lord's Day the question then will be faced. The righteousness that you must have in order to stand before God and to have fellowship with God already now and eternally, that righteousness that you must have, where does it come from? You say from Christ. Can a little bit of the righteousness that you need to be able to stand before God, can a little bit of that righteousness be from your good works? That's the question this Lord's Day will answer for us today. Can it be from our good works? Or to put it in differently, in different words: do our good works in some way bring us into covenant fellowship with God? Or maybe if God brings us into covenant, do our good works continue that covenant so that because I did good works today I can continue in my life with God in fellowship? Do my good works in some way establish the covenant or continue the covenant with God? And we're going to say absolutely no to that today. So then the question becomes: well then, what's the purpose of good works? Why should we be concerned about good works if they do not add to my righteousness, if they do not continue the covenant with God and they do not maintain it in any way? Why do good works? What place do good works have in the covenant? That's the theme of the sermon this morning: the place of good works in the covenant.

Well, notice in the first place, very negative, that good works are not a prerequisite to the covenant. We'll explain that word "prerequisite" in a moment. Good works are not a prerequisite to the covenant. Secondly, we'll show that they are a blessing in the covenant. Good works are a blessing in the covenant. Only those who are in the covenant will ever do good works. And third, good works are a sure fruit of the covenant. If you're in the covenant, you will do good works. It's absolutely certain.

So let's consider this Lord's Day under that theme and, first of all, notice that good works are not a prerequisite. What's a prerequisite? A prerequisite is a condition that has to be met before you can go to the next step. You go to high school, anybody that has been in high school now in college, you know that if you want to take Algebra II, the prerequisite is Algebra I. Before you can go to Algebra II, you must have completed Algebra I and passed it. That's the prerequisite. That's the condition under which you can go to Algebra

II. That's what we're talking about here, are good works a condition, a prerequisite, to entering into the covenant or maintaining the covenant in any way? That's the question.

Well, we address that by looking at the Lord's Day here. First of all, Question 62 asks, "But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?" Where does that question come from? Who asks that kind of a question, cannot our good works be a whole or a part of our righteousness before God? And the answer, who asked that question is, you do and I do. The Catechism isn't asking here an arbitrary question or a kind of out of curiosity, it puts it into our mouth. Why cannot our good works? It's talking about us. We are asking this question and we are asking this question because that's what we always want to think. Surely our good works must count for something before God. They must be good for something. They must be at least part of what makes God happy with us, delight in us, approve of us perhaps. After all, I do good. I come to church. I sing the songs of Zion. I pray to God. I try to live in such a way that I keep the sins of the world out of my life. I do good works. Do not those good works that we do in some way earn a righteousness before the tribunal of God? Proverbs 11:20 says, "They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the LORD," the stubborn, rebellious, they are an abomination, but then listen to the next line, "but such as are upright in their way are his delight."

So do not our good works in some way earn a little bit of our approval before God, a little bit of our righteousness? Now, this issue is not new. This issue, in fact, was raised thousands of years ago by Cain. Cain, who was told by his parents to bring an offering, brought an offering of his own works. "Look at what I have done! Look at what I have brought out of the ground!" He set them before God and thought in his heart, "God should be quite pleased with me that I have worked so diligently to bring out of this cursed ground these good fruits." Jacob likewise tried to earn God's approval and his blessing, purchasing the birthright blessing, even tricking his father into getting blessed. He thought he could accomplish by his own ways the blessing of God upon him. This is the error of the self-righteous Pharisees who looked at the law of God and said, "All right, this is what the law of God requires. We will do more than what the law requires, we will go above and beyond what the law requires, and surely then the works that we do will earn for us a righteousness with God because we have done more than what God requires." And Jesus said about their righteousness, he said to his disciples, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." And if you're looking for someone to keep the law, you cannot keep the law better than the Pharisee. They went beyond the law of God and yet Jesus said, "If your righteousness does not exceed theirs, you will not enter into the kingdom." You will not.

So it has been through the ages. Men have always tried to find a way to take their works and make it a reason why God saved them or make that part of their approval before God. The Pelagians did this 400 years after the Pharisees. They said an unregenerated man can do some good at least, a little bit of good, and the unregenerated man that does some good, God looking upon all the people of the world says, "Well, here's a man who is at least trying to do what I told him to do and so I will save him." He gets some approval

from God by the works that he does. Otherwise, said Pelagius, why would you ever say to a man, "You have to do good," if it doesn't profit him any? You have to be able to say it does you some good. God will save you if you try to do some good.

Augustine, who lived at the time of Pelagius, rejected that entirely on the basis of Scripture and said that's impossible. An unregenerated man has a filthy nature. He can only act in harmony with his corrupt nature and he can only sin, therefore. He can't do anything good that God would approve of. The Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages adopted a whole system of penance whereby men were able by good works to take away their sins and earn a righteousness with God. They looked at grace as being something God infused into them and when men got the grace of God and then kept the law of God, though imperfectly, that gave them at least some righteousness in the judgment. Most of the righteousness comes from Christ but at least some of it comes from the grace that works in man to keep the law.

The Reformation rejected that. These Lord's Days are reflecting exactly on that, on Rome's error. But after the Catechism so clearly sets it forth here, the heresies were not finished. The Arminians arose and the Arminians were really no different from the Pelagians, they just came dressed in finer clothes, and the Arminians say that man can choose the good, he can choose salvation, God's grace is necessary, of course, but God's grace is a resistible grace and so now when God's grace comes on you, you have to do something to make that operating grace effective in your life. You have to do something in order to be righteous, to be saved. The Synod of Dort rejected that entirely. No works. No works are a part of your salvation that will earn you or maintain a covenant with God. Through the ages, the church has faced this battle again and again, man trying to insert some works and the church saying the Bible will not allow it. The Bible insists on what we read here in Ephesians, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" and then if you're not sure yet, "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

The last area that heretics could attack is the area of the covenant and they would come and say, "We're five point Calvinists. We believe in the Canons of Dort, but you have to understand that the Canons of Dort didn't say much about the covenant, and the covenant is something that is conditional. It's not a one-sided covenant, a unilateral covenant as we say in theology, but it is a conditional covenant, and in that conditional covenant, God sets forth all the blessings that he has earned in Jesus Christ. They are all there, righteousness and life and all the blessings of the covenant. They are all set forth there and he promises them to those with whom he establishes his covenant, some would say all men, some say only those who are baptized, but God establishes his covenant with all of them and he gives these promises, he lays it out before them and they are all yours if. And the only thing you need to do is fulfill this one little condition." One prerequisite.

Now, the prerequisite varies. There are those who introduce into the covenant a kind of condition in the mystical branch of the Reformation found in the Netherlands quite often associated with the Netherlands Reformed, who really put a kind of condition there into the covenant and who have the idea that if you make yourself miserable enough over

your sins, that an unregenerated man can groan and sigh over his sins and make himself so utterly miserable that maybe God will have some mercy on him because he is so miserable. It introduced a kind of condition that you have to fulfill in order to have God look upon you in mercy. Unregenerated people, usually it's the condition of faith. And we have explained it this way before and I'm going to do it again without apology because I'm using their illustration, those who maintain the conditional covenant say that every child that is baptized gets a check from the bank, a check from God like a bank check. It's written out to his name, "John, this promises to you, it promises eternal life," and God signs that check and hands it to the child when he is baptized and says, "All these promises are yours if you will turn that check over and endorse it. If you do not endorse that check, then it's worthless to you. You must sign it and you do that by believing the promises. If you believe the promises, then all the promises become yours. That's all that is required of you, just the one condition of faith."

That's the battle of 1953 in the Protestant Reformed churches. You know the statements. Our act of conversion is prerequisite to entering into the kingdom of heaven. There is a prerequisite. There is a condition that has to be fulfilled. Before you enter the kingdom, you have to perform the act of turning yourself, conversion. God will regenerate but then you have to turn yourself, conversion, and then you can enter. Prerequisite. Or God promises to every one of you that if you believe, you will be saved. It promises to every one of you salvation to every single person. You can say it even to the person walking down the road, God promises to you this salvation if that prerequisite, that condition is fulfilled.

That's the battle of '53, that's the battle that is going on today and it has been expanded as they take that conditional idea and say not only must there be faith that you must have at the beginning to get into the covenant, but once you are in the covenant, you must continue in your good works. You must continue because part of your righteousness that you will have as you stand before God is the good works that you perform in this life. They are so bold today in Reformed and Presbyterian churches as to say that. Part of your righteousness before God as you stand on Judgment Day will be what you have done. Your good works.

The Catechism will have none of that. It maintains that our good works are not the whole of our righteousness before God, and not even a part of our righteousness before God. Why not? The answer of Question 62 is this, "Because the righteousness which can be approved of before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law." Just stop there. God is Judge and he judges the works of men, looking at them in their entirety, and the work must be absolutely and totally in harmony with his law, the law of God which begins this way as we said this morning, what's the summary of the law? Love God. Love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. The work that you perform, therefore, will be judged according to your heart, your mind, your will, what you were thinking about, what choices you were making, why you made the choices that you did, everything will be evaluated. You cannot have a work that is, so to speak, 90% good and has only 10% of it that is not good. God cannot look at that work and say, "Good work." God can only look at that work and

say, "That work as a whole does not meet the requirements that I have set forth. It is an unrighteous work. I condemn it. I condemn it."

God is too pure of eyes to behold iniquity. He cannot abide with anything that is not completely, perfectly righteous. To conform to the law, therefore, means that it must be in harmony with a love for God; it came out of the love for God. It must be a work that is performed with a right purpose. Our thoughts must be absolutely right. And the desire must be to glorify God, not ourselves. Every aspect of the work, thought and plan and purpose and goal and the actual carrying out of it, must be in perfect harmony with the law of God. God's standard of righteousness.

Can you do that? The Catechism says that we cannot. There is the other part of the answer, "our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin." Our best works. If you were to go before God tonight and say, "Lord, you saw me in church this morning, didn't you, how I was singing the Psalms? You saw me praying. You saw me put money in the collection plate." If I would go before God and say, "You saw me preaching this morning, didn't you? Those are good works, aren't they? Surely they must have earned something with you that all these things that we've done, these good works?" And God would say to us, "Those works, get them out of here! They are polluted! They are defiled! I couldn't possibly say about them that they are a righteousness that will cause you to stand before me. If that's what you come here on the basis of what you did this morning in church, you have no place with me. There is no room in heaven for you."

Do you believe that? This is a tremendous blow to our pride because we like to think that we are better than other people. Now, I don't mean that we think we are so good and everything, we are sinners and we know that, but surely we are better than many people in this life? And the Catechism says if we were to stand before God with our works, everything we've done from the beginning of our life to the end of our life, and stand there in the line in that courtroom with the rapist and the murderer and the thief who has stolen millions of dollars and those who bow the knee to the idols, we would all be condemned to hell. We've done nothing that would make us righteous before God. Nothing.

No wonder the Catechism says in the next answer, "What! Really? Nothing?" And then the Catechism says, "But wait a minute," it tries a little argument here, "do not our good works merit which God will reward in this and in a future life?" Doesn't God promise to reward our good works? Well, he certainly does. You remember what Jesus said to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret," and then notice, "and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."

There is a reward for giving money in the collection plate for benevolence. That's what this verse says. There is a reward there. And not only that, but Jesus made that abundantly plain in chapter 16, verse 27, when he said, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." So now the Catechism would draw on that and say the Bible says there is a reward for our works, so it must be that there is something worthwhile in the work, there must be something worthwhile there, it must earn something. And the Catechism's answer is, "There is a reward all right, but the reward is not of merit. There is no merit in your good works. The reward is a reward of grace." Now, we'll have to come back to that, not here in this point but we'll come back to this later.

What does that mean that there is a reward of grace, not of merit but of grace? For now we'll just consider this: they don't merit. No good work merits with God. And yet we might wonder" good works do have a place in our life, do they not? They have a place in the covenant of God? And the answer is yes, and that takes us to the second point of the sermon, namely that good works are a blessing in the covenant. As I pointed out at the beginning, a good work is something given to those only who are in the covenant.

Good works are a part of God's work of salvation. They are part of God's work of saving us. That is evident from what we read here in Ephesians 2, "God hath before ordained," the good works, "that we should walk in them." God planned the works. From all eternity he not only planned your life but he planned every single solitary good work that you would ever do, everyone; from the smallest thing that you hardly gave any thought to, to the worship of God on Sunday, he has planned every one of them. He saved you in Jesus Christ with a view to his glory, he re-created you in the image of Jesus Christ, and he determined you will bring forth this kind of good work on Sunday, this Sunday, and tomorrow and other, and Tuesday a different one, and he has planned them all.

You can go further than that: he has not only planned what those good works, he has before ordained, literally he has before prepared, he has prepared the good works. And children, you think of your mother preparing a whole meal, she gets everything ready. God has prepared the good work. He hasn't merely determined that you will do it, he has prepared it for us.

And then to go one step beyond that, he has not only planned it and prepared it, but now he works it in us because if he would give us the prepared good work we would still mess it all up. So Ephesians 2 is our guide here. Ephesians 2, remember where God says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and part of working out your salvation is doing a good work, "for," says the next verse, "it is God which worketh in you both the will and the to do of his good pleasure." God works it in us. It's the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. That's where grace comes from and that grace works powerfully in us. Jesus Christ sends his Spirit into our hearts and works in us the necessary elements for us to be able to do the good work and we simply live out of that power and do the good work. We do it. We do it, we are active, thinking, willing, planning, doing, but we are only living out of what Jesus has worked in us, what God has prepared for us, and what God has planned eternally.

And even then, it is an imperfect work. There is sin in it. But hereto is the function of the cross of Jesus Christ that covers the sin, removes the sin and puts righteousness upon us in our works and adds to that work everything that was lacking so that when God looks at that work that you have done that he planned, prepared, and worked in us, when God evaluates that work he says, "It's a good work. It is a good work." And it's a good work because the sin has been covered by the blood of Christ and because Christ by his perfect work has added to it what was lacking. That's why God says it's a good work. It is. That's why your work doesn't merit anything. All by itself the work could only be declared unrighteous, polluted, "Get it out of here!" But with the work of Christ added to it and covering it, God says it's a good work. So when God rewards that good work, it's not because the good work earned something, it's not of merit, it's only of grace.

God does reward. He absolutely does. He does in this life and in the future life. Let me illustrate that. To the youth who applies himself or herself to the study of the word of God and says, "I'm going to read the word of God daily. I'm going to try to understand it." That's a good work. That's a good work and God blesses that good work by his grace, giving to that young man or that young woman a knowledge of the Scriptures, giving to them wisdom so that they now can make decisions based on the word of God that they have studied in their lives. It's a good work. God blesses it. He gives them the strength to be able to stand against temptation because they have the word of God there to help them. God blesses that good work already in this life. Or again, someone who stands up for the cause of God who isn't afraid to show that he's a Christian even in the face of his peers who may not be living such a Christian life, that he dares to admonish his friends when they do not walk in obedience to the word of God, when he shuns the life of sin, when he stands up for the truth of God, God blesses that. That's a good work and God blesses that young man or young woman by making them to be stronger so that they can stand ever more in conflict. Calvin and Luther did not start out their conflict by standing in front of the Emperor and saying, "This is the truth that I believe." It started when they were younger when they were standing out for the truth and learning the truth until they reached the point that they had strength by the grace of God to stand in front of Emperors and confess God's truth. God rewards our labors already in this life. Husbands and wives in their marriage. Parents in instructing children. He rewards our good works far more than they could ever deserve because, remember, they are all polluted with sin but he still rewards them by grace.

He rewards them in the life to come. That's also the instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism. There are differences for all of us when we go to heaven. You can speak of it as levels of glory if you want. You can speak of it as different sized containers that are filled with the glory of God. All of us, all God's people will have the basic reward which is eternal life, but there will be differences there, obviously. I will not have the same position and reward as the Apostle Paul or a Luther or a Calvin. Of course not. God has worked many mighty works through those men and their reward, therefore, reflects that. God judges according to works, that is to say, he rewards them according to their works, but you understand what the Bible never teaches is that the good works become the basis

for their reward. Never the basis, only according to. God will give us our place, whatever that is in heaven, according to the life lived here. He will give us our place in heaven.

But again, it's obvious, is it not, that it's not of merit. It's only of grace. God who determined the good works and planned them and prepared them and worked them in us and then covers them with the blood of Jesus Christ, accepts those good works as good by grace alone and not based on merit. Good works, therefore, are a blessing to us in the covenant.

But where do all our actions fit in all of this? What do we do now? Just kind of sit back, read a book, watch television and wait for God to do a good work in us? Is that what we do in our life and say, "Well, if God has determined a good work, I'll do it. If he hasn't determined one in the next hour, nothing will happen." Is that how we go through life? Do we become careless? Do we become even profane? That's the charge of the Arminians and that's the last question of the Lord's Day, "But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?" Will that be the result? And again, the Catechism says no way. No way will this doctrine that your righteousness is not in any way your good works, that will not make you careless and profane because good works are a sure fruit of the covenant. A sure fruit. The baptism form says as there are in all covenants two parts, our part now is to trust in God and to do his will. That's a required element in the covenant. It's required. The covenant does not hinge on that else we are lost. The covenant is established by God and maintained by God and our righteousness is in Jesus Christ but he still comes to us with the command, "You are to trust in Jesus Christ, believe in him, and you are to obey."

But the Catechism says that's inevitable. "It is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness." Planted. You are planted into Jesus Christ. This is a beautiful figure. All the children here can understand the idea of planting in the spring time. You go out and you plant a flower, you put it in the ground, and the roots begin to grow into the ground and the plant, because it's living, begins to draw out of the ground the water that is necessary, the nutrients out of the soil that is necessary, and what happens? The plant grows because it is a living plant rooted in the ground. If you leave it out on the table without being rooted in the ground, it will die. Put a dead plant in the ground, nothing happens, but take a living plant and plant it in the ground and it draws out of the soil what it needs and then it grows, it produces more leaves, it produces a flower or a fruit. That's the good works. That's the fruit that a living plant inevitably produces when it is rooted in the ground. Now says the Catechism we are rooted in Jesus Christ. We are planted into him by a true and living faith. It's so important, that faith. We are planted into him and as we are planted into him, we draw out of him the spiritual nutrients necessary for us to live, and because we are living plants, we grow and produce the fruit of good works.

A living plant in the soil produces fruit. A living person planted into Jesus Christ produces fruit. That's the point that Jesus makes in John 15:5, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." That's what happens. If there is no fruit, no fruit in a person's life, it means that he's not alive

spiritually. It means that he is not rooted in Jesus Christ. And about him Jesus said in chapter 15, verse 6 of John, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

Every believer will produce good fruit consciously. Consciously. And now here's where the figure of a plant, so helpful, now that figure becomes inadequate because you're not a plant. You're not a plant that mindlessly draws out of the soil and mindlessly produces leaves and fruits and flowers. You are not a plant, you are a living, thinking, breathing, rational, moral creature and you have to produce good works consciously, deliberately thinking about them. That's what God expects of us. He doesn't expect that out of a little plant or little flower. He doesn't expect that a tree will think about producing an apple. He expects, demands that we will, we will think about it.

He excites in us the desire to do good works and he excites that exactly in the covenant life we have with God. Exactly there, because in our covenant life with God, we experience God's love. We experience his blessing day after day and that excites us to gratitude to produce good works that show our thankfulness to God for his work in the covenant. All those who know God are eager to show their love and their thankfulness and they produce good works.

Are good works important? Absolutely. They are crucial, not because they are a prerequisite to get into the covenant, not because they will maintain the covenant with God, that's not why they are important, not because in any way they contribute to our righteousness before God, but simply because we are living members of his body, of the covenant and, therefore, we show our thankfulness to God by our good works. That is the place of good works in the covenant. Amen.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we thank thee for thy glorious covenant and for the work that thou hast performed not only for us in Jesus Christ but in us by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Continue, Lord, thy covenant and make us to be living, fruitful vines that show forth our love and thankfulness and the work of thy grace by our good works. For the glory of thy name, this is our desire now and forever. Amen.