

## **Orthodoxy: Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ**

New City Catechism Q.:33 Should those who have faith in Christ seek their salvation through their own works, or anywhere else?

Answer: No, they should not, as everything necessary to salvation is found in Christ. To seek salvation through good works is a denial that Christ is the only Redeemer and Savior.

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. - Galatians 2:16

Everything necessary for a person's eternal salvation is in Christ alone. The fear that saying this will lead the church to become indifferent, lazy, and worldly is a fear not perfected by love. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn.3:16). Therefore, God mercifully accepts any person as righteous on the merits of Christ alone, regardless of their works. God saves by his free grace by imputing the righteousness of Christ to the account of guilty sinners. This lovingkindness and grace persuades people that their only grounds of acceptance with God is the person and works of Christ. Therefore, they throw off any confidence in their works.

The rich young man confidently questioned Jesus concerning what he must do to inherit God's eternal kingdom. But because his confidence was in his works, and not the works of Christ on his behalf, he went away disheartened (Lk.18:18-23). But the tax collector praying in a far off corner of the Temple put no confidence in his works. He prayed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" And Jesus declared, "This man went down to his house justified." (Lk.18:9-14). The person who confidently exalts themselves because of their works will be humbled, but the person who humbles themselves without any confidence in their works will be exalted by grace.

Works are a gracious result of faith. But works added to faith as a means of confidence for salvation is ruinous to the soul. If a person tries to add to the work accomplished by Christ in his death and resurrection, then he subtracts from Christ's work making himself savior. Christ's work is complete. He said from the cross, "It is finished!" This is why Paul says above "that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" and that "if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary [to this]...let him be accursed." (Gal.1:9).

When you rise up in the morning and go to bed at night is it God's salvation through the grace of Jesus Christ alone that speaks to your heart? Horatius Bonar helps us sing the grace of Jesus into our hearts with these words,

Thy works, not mine, O Christ,  
Speak gladness to this heart;  
They tell me all is done;  
They bid my fear depart,  
To whom, save thee,  
Who canst alone for sin atone,  
Lord, shall I flee?

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## James on Trials: Making It Practical

We began our series on “The Practical Christian Life” from the book of James on Sunday. I want to encourage you to make what we heard from James 1:1-18 on trials practical. Below is an outline of the sermon and some practical questions to think through.

### The Design of Trials

One of the most common human experiences we share are trials. James tells us our trials are of “various kinds” (1:3). We tend to move on to the next thing missing the value of God’s design for our trials.

- ❖ Take some time and think through what are the various trials you have recently or are presently experiencing? You may want to do this with someone else in the body of Christ so that you can see the “various kinds” that James is referring to and value together God’s design by not minimizing your trials or over emphasizing your trials to the neglect of someone else’s.

We saw that God’s design in our trials is to make new and whole human beings like Jesus who trust the Father and are obedient to the Father in love in the midst of the difficulties we face in this life. (1:3-4, 12, 18).

- ❖ Take time to give thanks to God for the work of grace he’s doing in your life through the trials you have or are presently experiencing.
- ❖ Take time in prayer, asking God, - Not - “Why is this happening?” But “How do you want me to be more like Jesus, more human, at this time?” Or, “What is the steadfast faith and love you want to work in me at this time?”

### The Danger of Trials

We looked at three dangers in trials: desires, foolishness, and position. God does not tempt us, derailing us from steadfastness and becoming more like Jesus in trials.

We are led away into sin, our own distrust and unloving disobedience to God, by our own desires (1:13-15).

- ❖ What are you blaming God for in your trials?
- ❖ What does this blame look like in your life - indifference, bitterness, anger, anxiety, depression, addiction, etc.?
- ❖ Think about who God is from his Word (eg.1:13, 17) - thank him, and ask him to give you the grace to trust him in the midst of your trials.
- ❖ What are the desires you have that are not being fulfilled in the midst of your trials? How are those desires too weak or how do they fall short of what God provides for you as the end of those desires? What affect is your over desiring good things having on your relationship with God and others? Who can you trust God to be and what can you trust him to do for you in the midst of your over desires?

We are also in danger of our own foolishness in trials (1:5-8). We’re dangerously foolish and double minded when we don’t trust God for the wisdom we need in the midst of trials. But God gives his wisdom graciously, abundantly, and without favoritism to all of his children who ask him (1:5).

- ❖ How are you foolishly trusting in yourself or others instead of God for wisdom in your trial?
- ❖ Take time to ask God for the wisdom you need in your various trials at this time.

We live a dangerous life in trials when we don’t live in our gospel position before God, ourselves, others, and the world. Our gospel position is one of humiliation and exaltation in the grace of Jesus Christ even as we fade in this life (1:9-11). We’re in danger when we live out our trials in our socioeconomically poor or wealthy position.

We live thinking we need more when we’re exalted in Christ, or we live thinking we have it all when we’re humbled in Christ. In trials we envy, grow bitter and discontent becoming ungrateful; or, we pridefully look to ourselves, our resources, and hold others in contempt.

- ❖ Take time to consider the humble and exalted position you presently have in Jesus Christ and give thanks.
- ❖ How do you think your socioeconomic position adds to or takes away from your trials?
- ❖ Think about how from your gospel position you can generously help someone else going through a trial who is in a different socioeconomic position than yourself.

### The Delight of Trials

We saw that the delight of trials is God himself. He is the crown of life we’re meant to have now and inherit forevermore through trials. (1:12)

- ❖ Take time to count to “count it all joy” (1:3), to delight in God who delights in you, in the midst of the trials you’re facing, even if it is a wintry joy.
- ❖ Think about how the gospel of Jesus allows you to have God as your delight in the midst of your trials - by who he is, what he’s done for you, what he’s doing for you now, and what he promises to be and do for you.