

Orthodoxy: Grace, Faith, and Works

New City Catechism Q.34 Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God's Word?

Answer: Yes, because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Spirit; so that our lives may show love and gratitude to God; so that we may be assured of our faith by the fruits; and so that by our godly behavior others may be won to Christ.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. - 1 Peter 2:9-12

Christians are the works of the triune God. We can be called children of the Father. We have our life in the Son. We are indwelt by the Spirit. Therefore, Christians are the workmanship of God created in Christ Jesus for good works of love to God and neighbor.

The good works of a Christian's life are the fruit of God's good work of salvation. In the continual view of God's mercies the Christian continually offers their whole self to God for his will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven. Good works, as defined by God in his word, are the expressions of the Christians gratitude and love toward God. Jesus expressed it in this way to his followers, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (Jn.14:15). With our whole lives filled with the fullness of God, knowing the greatness of the love of God for us in Christ, we respond with thankfulness so that he is glorified in the fruitfulness he works in us. As the apostle Paul says, "I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." (1Cor.15:10). The Christian is saved by grace so that he or she may work by grace through faith in expressions of love.

The good works in the Christian's life are for his or her benefit as they assure them of God's grace at work in their life. The Christian can be assured of their salvation in the works of Christ for them in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. That assurance continues when they see the fruit of his grace through works done by faith. When Paul writes to the troubled church in Corinth, he does not begin by telling them of all things that are troubling and concerning him about them. He begins with thanksgiving "because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge." (1Cor.1:5). He looks at the fruit of their life in speech and knowledge, and other gifts expressed as works (1:6), and it assures him of the grace of salvation they're experiencing in Christ. The Christian should look to see the evidence of the grace of God at work in their life by the works of love they see God doing in and through them by his grace to assure them that they belong to him.

Finally, Christians, by grace, do works of faith according to God's will revealed in his word, so that others see those works and glorify the Father in heaven. Jesus prayed at the end of his earthly ministry, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do." (Jn.17:4). Those who live by faith in Christ glorify God the Father by doing the works he's given us to do. And those who witness these works of God in and through us are given a reason to glorify God by faith in Jesus Christ. As we do his works we proclaim his salvation giving a reason for the hope that is in us. But we also do his works in godly quiet humble faithful living so that our neighbors will see his grace at work in us and glorify our Heavenly Father who saves us by his grace.

The Christian does not do good works to get God to love him or her. We do good works because we are filled with the fullness of God knowing the love he has for us in Christ. He is our daily bread who satisfies us, so that we may show others where we, together with them, get our daily bread as our satisfaction, rest, joy, and righteousness.

The Practical Christian Life: Living By God's Word

On Sunday we looked together at James 1:19-27. We saw how the Christian life is formed by receiving and participating in God's word. The Bible is revelational not informational. The Bible is God's means of transformation not transmission. The Bible shapes a story of grace in our lives not stairs to self righteousness. Therefore, by grace we receive God's words to participate in God's will of salvation.

How is your reception of God's word shaping your participation? One way you can enhance your receiving of God's word and your participation in God's word is by using the Formation Devotional. It is designed for you to receive daily readings in the Psalms, New Testament and Old Testament. It follows a form or a liturgy. There are prayers and readings that form your reception and participation in God's words morning and evening. Two psalms a day form your prayerful thoughts toward God, yourself, and the world. The New Testament readings each morning begin in the gospels and then take you into the practical implications of the gospel with its culmination in the new heavens and the new earth by the end of the year. The Old Testament readings in the evenings will take you through the law, writings, and prophets in three years. There you are formed as you read the revelation of Jesus Christ as told by God through his prophets of old. This form of spiritual reading and praying each day allows you to receive and participate. You can simply ask the Lord what there is to receive from him and what there is to participate in him by faith in Christ each day. This is how God can shape the stories our lives tell as we live by faith in him.

Shepherding Group Zoom Meetings

Our elders and deacons are charged with keeping watch over (Acts 20:28) and serving (Acts 6:2) the flock of God, his church. We use Shepherding Groups as a means of organizing this care and service. We have four Shepherding Groups, Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Each group is made up of people living in a certain area of our city or community. Each group is represented by elders and deacons.

One of the ways we're trying to stay connected, keep watch, and serve the congregation during this time is by regular Zoom meetings of the Shepherding Groups. The goal of our leadership is to host a Zoom meeting of the Shepherding Group at least twice a month. Please be on the lookout in your email for an invitation to join one of these meetings. The invitation may come from an elder or a deacon in your Shepherding Group. The meeting may take place on Sunday right after our online worship, or another time during the week. We encourage you to participate in our Life Together in this way.

Good Reading for a Practical Christian Life

Eat This Book, Conversations in the Art of Spiritual Reading, Eugene Peterson

Eat This Book challenges us to read the Scriptures on their own terms, as God's revelation, and to live them as we read them. With warmth and wisdom Peterson offers greatly needed, down-to-earth counsel on spiritual reading. In these pages he draws readers into a fascinating conversation on the nature of language, the ancient practice of lectio divina, and the role of Scripture translations.

How to Read the Bible as Literature: . . . and Get More Out of It, Leland Ryken

If you want to rightly understand the Bible, you must begin by recognizing what it is: a composite of literary styles. It is meant to be read, not just interpreted. The Bible's truths are embedded like jewels in the rich strata of story and poetry, metaphor and proverb, parable and letter, satire and symbolism. Paying attention to the literary form of a passage will help you understand the meaning and truth of that passage. How to Read the Bible as Literature takes you through the various literary forms used by the biblical authors. This book will help you read the Bible with renewed appreciation and excitement and gain a more profound grasp of its truths.