

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2013 EVENING SERVICE

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Psalm of praise: 146:1, 4

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 19:6

Scripture reading: Matthew 7:11-29 and Isaiah 64:6

Scripture text: Catechism Sunday 14. Isaiah 64:6

But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.
(Isaiah 64:6)

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.
(Matthew 7:18)

It does not really matter whether we are living in the times of the Old Testament or the New Testament because

- God uses the same judgement about our sins
- and on the other hand, through the Lord Jesus, He also grants us the same love and forgiveness of sin.

In this sermon we consider the following aspects relevant to good works (fruit):

- 1. Lack of good works in the life of the believer.**
- 2. The Lord changes us, enabling us to do good works.**

1. Good works in the life of a believer.

This is a very important matter: A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

- Where amongst us do you find somebody only bearing good fruit? There is no such person.
- The logical deduction is thus that we all are bad trees.
- No person existing at any time is worth anything out of himself, facing the Lord.
- No person is worth anything out of himself to God

This causes tension to many people. The Bible teaches that only by perfect works can we exist facing God. What now?

- In the Old Testament, Psalm 14:1, it is written that there is none that does good.
- In the New Testament the viewpoint of the Lord is still exactly the same – see Romans 3:23 where the Lord teaches that all people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- Against this backdrop you must now see Jesus telling the people that they should be perfect like God. (this is recorded in Matthew 5:48) And it was all sinners the Lord later would have died for!

Let us test our good works against what Christ teaches.

- Once a lawyer approached Jesus and put a question to Him. (Matthew 22:36 onwards)
- He wanted to know which one of the commandments was the greatest around which everything revolved.

Then the Lord Jesus answered:

" 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' "This is the first and great commandment. "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

How should one now judge it that you must serve the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind?

- How good is it to trust on our own needs?
- Human judgement about matters is never completely pure. Our viewpoints and evaluations all differ.
- Our determining of our needs have for centuries suffered under sin and because our judgement is impaired our judgement will not always be what the Lord wants it to be. Israel's judgement failed them in exactly the same way. Consider the terrible confession they, when it was too late, came up with. (Isaiah 64:6):

But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

Of course our lives also have another side to it. Should we be obedient to the Lord, then we may come to light with beautiful and good matters in our lives.

- In John 15:5 it is recorded that all who abide in Jesus Christ will bear good fruit like branches grafted onto a good vine.
 - This means that we can do good works when we do not trust onto our own needs, but in obedience completely submit to Jesus Christ.
 - Here the Lord refers to total and very painful change: I must be pruned from my own life and grafted onto another Tree (Christ) then I must grow or it is finished!
 - Such people, because Christ died for such sinners like us, so that we can perform better, are reprieved in the judgement of the Lord.
 - He was put to shame so that we may evade the shame of hell.

- John 15 puts a few matters clearly. From your own power you cannot do good works.
 - The vine feeding you is not your own trunk – you are grafted thereon.
 - You also cannot bear your own fruit, because the fruit appear due to the trunk feeding you.
 - This is exactly the same as what is written in our text of scripture. Good trees bear good fruit.

The beautiful things we do are not the cause, but the result of God’s mercy towards us.

- The logical deduction is thus that should you bear no fruit, then something is seriously wrong with your faith life.
- Then you are not grafted onto the branch of Jesus’ redemption. You can then only grow on Satan’s branch.

2. The Lord changes us, enabling us to do good works.

It is because by ourselves we are too weak to be completely good that Isaiah writes in verse 8:

**But now, O Lord, You are our Father;
We are the clay,
and You our Potter....**

In the language of the New Testament we would say: Lord, by ourselves we cannot succeed. Change us by Your Word and Spirit in Christ so that we are able to serve and worship You properly.

In the New Testament Paul had a sermon about this text in Isaiah 64.

- In Romans 9:21 he wrote that in the hands of God, all people are like clay.
 - He depicts God as a Potter, using clay to make all sorts of objects.
 - Out of some clay objects of honour are made and out of other clay objects of dishonour are made.

- Furthermore Paul wrote that the clay cannot blame the Potter for being made as it is. God makes each of the objects for a purpose and that object has to fulfill the functions it was made for.

Seen against the backdrop of good works it means that the Lord made us to glorify Him and not ourselves.

- Therefore we have to glorify the Lord by everything we daily do
- Then we no longer do good works with the aim of wanting to earn something through it.
- Then we do good works because we want to do it for the purpose the Lord created us.
- *We are sinful, yet redeemed out of mercy. We are very guilty, but also very special. The Lord chose us and made us His property.*

We should thus know no other God than the Lord and our faith should be so true that we would never be able to switch to another faith as worshipping the Triune God.

But now we have read that it was different. Consider what is written in Isaiah!

- The works of these people was not good. Their works were like dirty clothes.
- Their deeds of faith – and that included their daily lives, because your conduct stems from your faith, - was so bad that the Lord, in aid of moving them to conversion, had to send them away in exile.

It is unthinkable that a nation having so much to do with the presence of God could wander so far away from Him. *This causes you to wonder how far we have wandered off, especially as we have to believe without ever seeing or hearing the Lord like this nation saw and heard the Lord.*

The people we have read about, in their impurity, symbolize us in our sinful condition. Now we might argue that we have the Lord Jesus and His atonement, which they did not have. Fine.

- But why must we still be obedient to the law of the Old Testament? It is works typically Old Testament.
- And the redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ at any rate teaches that merit does count for your salvation. Our good works are out of gratitude to the virtues and affects of Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice and in compliance to God the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament mentions quite a few times that the Lord will reward us for our works. Christ puts the matter of reward in its proper place.

- We do not work for remuneration, but to the glory of God.
- And then we realize that indeed the Lord is overpaying us. We arrive at Him with broken conformity. But in Christ He rewards us with the forgiveness of all our sins and with the glory of His heaven.

We are thus not paid for the work we do – we are rewarded according to what the Lord Jesus earned for us.

- He died and carried all God's wrath for our inability to be good and proper.
- When we then face God in the final judgement, we are absolved from our sins and incompetence, because Christ atoned us to God.

Now, with all rights, you may ask: Does this doctrine not create insouciant people? No, of course not!

- There are many insouciant and even evil people, but that is not due to the Bible.
- It is also not due to the doctrine of salvation and exemption of sin. They are just not true believers, and their lives prove it.

The people, on the other hand, who realize that Christ died for their sakes, know to render gratitude to the Lord.

- They also realize that the only way of proving it by your life is to fill your life with good deeds.
- They do not try achieving something by good deeds – they only try holding on to the example set by the Lord Jesus and to do what the Holy Spirit tells them.

Therefore, when we do not do good works, we are punished. We may not abandon our good works just because of the greatness of God's mercy as negligence in the way you honour God has to be punished.

Beloved congregation, persevere with joy in your good works.

- We know that it does not engineer our salvation, but do not let this worry you, we, at any rate, know that in Jesus Christ we already possess the salvation.
- But let us prove by our good works that we bear the image of God and that we are worthy of the redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Come let our image of redemption shine in our obedience and worship of the Triune God.

Let us read together Catechism Sunday 24:

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, (a)

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. (b)

(a)

Gal.3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Deut.27:26 Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.

(b)

Isa.64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Q. 63.

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

A.

This reward is not of merit, but of grace. (a)

(a)

Luke 17:10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

Q. 64.

But does 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. (a)

(a)

Matt.7:18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

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: for without me ye can do nothing.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 86:3

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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