

# WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

## SHORTER CATECHISM

### LESSON # 24 (Q2LES11)

## GOOD WORKS, PERSEVERANCE, & ASSURANCE

#### 1. Prayer

#### 2. Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 5: 1 - 21

3. **Review:** We have been learning about the process of redemption and benefits, which accompany it in this life. Last week we learned about the “benefits” we receive from Christ. There are three sets of benefits for believers, benefits in this life, benefits at death, and benefits at the resurrection. We looked at how these “benefits” are presented in the SC, and in the LC, noting that, while there are major differences in how they are presented in the SC and LC, primarily in the vocabulary used, the theology presented does not differ. While we may receive “benefits” in the Shorter Catechism, we receive “communion in grace”, and “communion in glory” of the Larger Catechism. We also took a more detailed look at the benefits we receive from Christ in this life.

4. **Introduction** – We will begin with a subject that is not covered specifically in the SC, but is covered in detail in the WCF. The subject is “good works”, found in chapter 16 (Of Good Works) of the WCF. I found its discussion of works and their relation to salvation very interesting. If we finish our discussion on work, we are going to wrap up question 36, with particular attention to the fifth cited benefit. The SC covers “perseverance” briefly as the last of the five benefits that accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification. The WCF contains two chapters on this subject, chapters 17 (Of the Perseverance of the Saints) and 18 (Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation); the LC has three questions concern dealing specifically with perseverance and assurance.

#### 5. Questions:

Question 36: **What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification**

Answer: **The benefits which in this life do flow from justification, adoption and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.**

#### 8. GOOD WORKS

- a. Chapter 16 of the WCF is titled "Of Good Works". It is a very interesting chapter, from which we can develop an understanding of good works, and their relation to salvation.
- b. What are Good Works? WCF, chapter 16, para 1 says: *"Good works are only such as God hath commanded in His holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised of men, but out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention."* (**Micah 6:8** *"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"*)

So good works are the things that God tells us to do.

- c. Can we do good works by ourselves?

No

- d. What is required for us to do good works?

WCF chapter 16, para 3 adds: *"Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ. And that they may be enabled thereunto, besides the grace they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure: yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit; but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them."*

Therefore good works are:

- Wholly from the Spirit of Christ (**John 15: 4 – 5** *"<sup>(4)</sup>Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.<sup>(5)</sup>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."*)
  - There is required an actual influence of the Holy Spirit, to work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure. (**Philippians 2:13** *"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*)
- e. How close can man come by himself, through good works, to meeting the requirements of God? WCF, c16p4 says: *"They, who in their obedience attain to*

*the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do."*

Supererogate? Again to my trusty Webster's New 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dictionary.

Supererogate: to do more than duty requires or than is expected.

To make up for some deficiency in another by extraordinary effort.

Paragraph 5 adds this very important information: "*We cannot, by our best works, merit pardon for sin, or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and glory to come; and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom, by them, we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and because, as they are good, they proceed from His Spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.*" (Titus 3: 5 - 7 "<sup>(5)</sup>**Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of his Holy Ghost;** <sup>(6)</sup>**Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;** <sup>(7)</sup>**That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**")

Answer: not even close.

- f. Are our good works acceptable to God? How? WCF, ch16, para 6 says: "*Yet notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him, not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unreprouable in God's sight; but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.*"

Through Christ **only** are our works acceptable to God. (Heb 13: 20 – 21 "<sup>(20)</sup>**Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,** <sup>(21)</sup>**Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**")

- g. Can unregenerate man do good works? WCF, c16p7 has a very interesting answer: "*Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith; nor are*

*done in a right manner according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet, their neglect of them is more sinful, and displeasing unto God.”*

Let's look at what this is telling us.

- Works done by unregenerate man
    - May be things God commands
    - May be of good use to themselves and others
  - However,
    - because they do not proceed from a heart purified by faith,
    - nor are done in a right manner according to the word
    - nor to a right end, the glory of God
  - They are sinful,
  - cannot please God
  - cannot buy salvation from God
  - AND, the neglecting of them makes God even more angry.
- h. What is the relationship of good works to the believer? WCF, c16p2 says, *“These good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto; that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life.”*

These good works are:

- done in obedience to God’s commandments (**Eph 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”**)

- are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith (**James 2: 18 - 22** “<sup>(18)</sup>*Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.* <sup>(20)</sup>*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble,* <sup>(20)</sup>*But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* <sup>(21)</sup>*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the alter?* <sup>(22)</sup>*Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”*) Relationship of works to faith!!!! What is that relationship?
- and by them believers:
  - manifest their thankfulness
  - strengthen their assurance
  - edify their brethren
  - adorn the profession of the gospel
  - stop the mouths of the adversaries
  - and glorify God
- whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto See (**Eph 2:10**), above.
- that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life (**Rom 6:22** “*But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*”)

## 6. perseverance therein to the end.

- a. The fifth benefit those that are j, a, & s partake of in this life is “perseverance therein till the end”? This is the “P” in the TULIP doctrine. It is of such importance and concern to believers that the WCF contains a separate chapter of perseverance, and an additional chapter on assurance of grace and salvation.
- b. Question 79 of the LC asks: “*May not true believers, by reason of their imperfections, and the many temptations and sins they are overtaken with, fall away from the spirit of grace?*”
- c. The answer to LC question 79 is: “True believers, by reason of the unchangeable love of God, and his decree and covenant to give them perseverance, their inseparable union with Christ, his continual intercession for them, and the Spirit and seed of God abiding in them, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

The WCF, chapter 17, para 1 says: *“They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally, nor finally, fall away from the state of grace: but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. (John 10: 27 – 29 <sup>“(27)”</sup>My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: <sup>(28)</sup>And I give them eternal life; and thy shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. <sup>(29)</sup>My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”* )

- d. TV, in discussing question 36, benefit #5, asks this question: “Do all truly justified, adopted and sanctified persons persevere to the end?”

His answer: ‘All truly justified, adopted, and sanctified persons do persevere in grace to the end to the end, and shall assuredly attain the heavenly inheritance.’”

- e. TV asks after that question: “How do you prove this?”

His answers: (Discuss each point)

- From God’s everlasting, unchangeable love, and his faithfulness in his promise of perseverance, as well as of heaven, which he hath made unto them. **(2 Tim 2: 18 – 19 <sup>“(18)”</sup>Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. <sup>(19)</sup>Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”)**
- From their union and relation to Christ, and his undertaking for them. **(Heb 10:10 <sup>“(10)”</sup>By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”)**
- From the constant abode and indwelling of the Spirit of God in them. **(John 14: 16 – 17 <sup>“(16)”</sup>And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he way abide with you for ever; <sup>(17)</sup>Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”)**
- From the nature of grace; which is an abiding seed, which can never be totally extirpated. **(Jeremiah 32:40 <sup>“(40)”</sup>And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.”)**

These answers come directly from the WCF, c17p2, which says, *“This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; and the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.”*

- h. A sidebar to this question: Once we have been justified and adopted, and sanctification is in progress, can we again fall into sin?

C17p3 of the WCF says: *“Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time continue therein: whereby they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgment upon themselves.”*

Let’s look at what this paragraph says.

- The believer may
  - Through the temptations of Satan
  - Through the temptations of the World
  - The *prevalency* of corruption remaining in them
  - The neglect of their means of their preservation
- Fall into grievous sin
- For a time continue therein
- In doing this they:
  - Incur God’s displeasure
  - Grieve His Holy Spirit
  - come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts
  - have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded,
  - hurt and scandalize others
  - bring temporal judgment upon themselves

# WEEKLY READINGS

## JUNE 1998

### 7 JUNE 1998

RR: David Lee DL  
OT: Rich Stone RS  
NT: Jonathan Eisenzoph JE

### 14 JUNE 1998

RR: Bill Phister BP  
OT: Roger Forsyth RF  
NT: Philip Payne PP

### 21 JUNE 1998

RR: Benjamin Elliot BE  
OT: Jeff Holbrook JH  
NT: Rick Hepburn RH

### 28 JUNE 1998

RR: Pete Kelly PK  
OT: John Stallings JS  
NT: Robert Thoburn RT