

The Augsburg Confession 7

Lesson Seven: Articles VI, XX Faith and Good Works

Introduction

If a person is saved by grace alone through simple trust in Jesus as Savior, doesn't that become a license to behave in whatever sinful way a human being desires?

The accusation that Christians are wanton libertines is not a new one. In the book of Romans Paul referred to people who asserted, "Let us sin that grace may increase. The greater the sin, the more the grace." Paul rightly concluded, "Their condemnation is deserved."

One of the greatest fears expressed by the Roman Church during the time of the Reformation was that if people are really set free from the works of the law they won't behave themselves. They would not bring offerings. They would not submit to authority. They would use Christian liberty as an excuse for all kinds of sinful behavior. Anarchy would prevail. Some taught that it was important to keep pushing salvation by works, so that people would stay in line and behave properly. These people did not really understand the power of the gospel and the powerful urge created by the Holy Spirit in a Christian heart to love the Savior and to love our neighbor.

Article VI - New Obedience

It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded, but we should do them for God's sake and not place our trust in them as if thereby to merit favor before God. ² For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ himself says, "So you

also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants'" (Luke 17:10). ³ The Fathers also teach thus, for Ambrose says, "It is ordained of God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved, and he shall have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit."

The Christianity life is characterized by obedience

1 Corinthians 6:19,20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

John 8:34, 36 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Use your Bible to look up **Romans 6:17-22**. What does the new obedience of a Christian look like?

Acts 6:7 The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Romans 1:5 Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

The motivation for obedience

Christian obedience is a new, child-like obedience, not the old servile obedience that seeks advantage, reward, enjoyment, or flees from punishment.

Galatians 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Evaluate this statement: A Christian is compelled to do good works.

Good works are the fruits of faith

1. Through faith the Christian is received into the grace of God. See **John 15:1-8** for the source of fruit.
2. Justification by faith alone is not detrimental to good works.

Romans 3:31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

3. Fruit will naturally and inevitably be produced through faith.

Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Matthew 7:17-20 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Matthew 12:33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit."

God wants us to perform good works

1. Commandments of men are of no value, e.g., chastity, poverty, and obedience in the monastic sense.
Matthew 15:9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.
2. There are no good works apart from the will and command of God.

What drives a Christian to do good works is the restored harmony with the will of God.

Faith alone can produce good works. **Hebrews 11:6** And without faith it is impossible to please God.

A Christian is a new creation of God. **2 Corinthians 5:17** If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has gone; the new has come.

Use your Bible to look up **Galatians 5:16-24** and answer the following questions:

What is the consequence of continuing to live according to the sinful nature?

When the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, what is our natural Christian response to God's love in Jesus?

What reward do we deserve for the good works we perform? **Luke 17:10** "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

Read Jesus' account of the Last Judgment in **Matthew 25:31-46**. This section is often referenced as proof that good works are necessary for salvation. But look a little closer and answer this question: What are the people on the left and right *trusting in* as they stand in the judgment?

Objections have been raised against the Lutheran doctrine of salvation (*sola gratia, sola fide*, without works) on the grounds that it is destructive of the doctrine of good works. This is evidence of the servile mind that knows of no obedience save that which is inspired by reward or compulsion. Remember the natural human mindset, the *opinio legis* or "law-attitude." God's grace gives us a new mind and a new heart, a new way of thinking. This is *repentance*.

Formula of Concord, TD, Art. II, p 902, 56:

"For concerning the presence, operation, and gifts of the Holy Spirit we should not and cannot always judge *ex sensu* [from feeling], as to how and when they are experienced in the heart; but because they are often covered and occur in great weakness, we should be certain from, and according to, the promise, that the Word of God

preached and heard is truly an office and work of the Holy Spirit, by which He is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts.”

Article XX: Good Works

Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding Good Works. ² For their published writings on the Ten Commandments, and others of similar importance, bear witness that they have taught to good purpose concerning all estates and duties of life, as to what estates of life and what works in every vocation are pleasing to God. ³ Concerning these things preachers previously taught but little, and urged only childish and needless works, as special holy days, special fasts, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, services in honor of saints, the use of rosaries, monasticism, and such things. ⁴ Since our adversaries have been admonished of these things, they are now unlearning them, and do not preach these unprofitable works as previously. ⁵ Besides, they begin to mention faith, of which there was previously amazing silence. ⁶ They teach that we are justified not by works alone, but they join faith and works together, and say that we are justified by faith and works. ⁷ This doctrine is more tolerable than the former one. It can offer more consolation than their old teaching.

⁸ The doctrine concerning faith, which ought to be the chief one in the Church, has remained unknown for so long. All must concede that there was the deepest silence in their sermons concerning the righteousness of faith, while only the doctrine of works was treated in the churches. Therefore our teachers have instructed the churches concerning faith as follows:

⁹ First, that our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins, grace, and justification, but that we obtain this only by faith when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been set forth as the Mediator and Propitiation (1 Tim. 2:5), in order that the Father may be reconciled through him. ¹⁰ Whoever, therefore, trusts that he merits grace by works, despises the merit and grace of Christ, and seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength, even though Christ has said of himself: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

¹¹ This doctrine concerning faith is everywhere treated by Paul, (Eph. 2:8): By grace are you saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, etc.

¹² And lest anyone should craftily say that a new interpretation of Paul has been devised by us, this entire matter is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers. For ¹³ Augustine, in many volumes, defends grace and the righteousness of faith, over against the

merits of works. ¹⁴ And Ambrose, in his *De Vocatione Gentium* [The Call of the Nations], and elsewhere, teaches the same thing. For in his *De Vocatione Gentium* he says as follows:

Redemption by the blood of Christ would become of little value, neither would the preeminence of man's works be superseded by the mercy of God, if justification, which is wrought through grace, were due to the merits going before, so as to be, not the free gift of a donor, but the reward due to the laborer.

¹⁵ But, although this doctrine is despised by the inexperienced, nevertheless God-fearing and anxious consciences find by experience that it brings the greatest consolation, because consciences cannot be set at rest through any works, but only by faith, when they take the sure ground that for Christ's sake they have a reconciled God. As Paul teaches, ¹⁶ (Rom. 5:1) “Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.” ¹⁷ This whole doctrine is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience, neither can it be understood apart from that conflict. Therefore ¹⁸ inexperienced and profane men judge ill concerning this matter, who dream that Christian righteousness is nothing but civil and philosophical righteousness.

¹⁹ Up until now, consciences were plagued with the doctrine of works. They did not hear the consolation from the gospel. ²⁰ Some persons were driven by conscience into the desert, into monasteries hoping there to merit grace by a monastic life. ²¹ Some also devised other works by which to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins. ²² Thus there was very great need to deal with, and renew, this doctrine of faith in Christ, so that anxious consciences should not be without consolation, but that they might know that grace and forgiveness of sins and justification are apprehended by faith in Christ.

²³ Men are also admonished that here the term “faith” does not signify merely the knowledge of the history, such as is in the ungodly and in the devil, but signifies a faith which believes, not merely the history, but also the effect of the history – namely, this article: The forgiveness of sins, specifically that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ.

²⁴ Now he that knows that he has a Father gracious to him through Christ, truly knows God; he knows also that God cares for him, and calls upon God; in a word, he is not ²⁵ without God, as the heathen. For devils and the ungodly are not able to believe this article: The

forgiveness of sins. Therefore they hate God as an enemy, do not call upon him,²⁶ and expect no good from him. Augustine also admonishes his readers concerning the word “faith,” and teaches that the term “faith” is accepted in the Scriptures not for knowledge, such as is in the ungodly, but for confidence which consoles and encourages the terrified mind.

²⁷ Furthermore, it is taught on our part that it is necessary to do good works – not that we should trust to merit grace by them, but because it is the will of God.²⁸ It is only by faith and nothing else that forgiveness of sins is apprehended.²⁹ And because through faith the Holy Spirit is received, hearts are renewed and endowed with new affections, so as to be able to bring forth good works.³⁰ For Ambrose says: Faith is the mother of a good will and right doing.³¹ For man's powers without the Holy Spirit are full of ungodly affections, and are too weak to do works which are good in God's sight.³² Besides, they are in the power of the devil who drives people to diverse sins,³³ to ungodly opinions, to open crimes. This we

may see in the philosophers, who, although they strived to live an honest life could not succeed³⁴ but were defiled with many open crimes. Such is the feebleness of man when he is without faith and without the Holy Spirit, and when he governs himself only by human strength.

³⁵ Therefore it may be readily seen that this doctrine is not to be charged with prohibiting good works, but rather the more to be commended, because it shows how we are enabled to do good works.³⁶ For without faith human nature can in no way do the works of the First or of the Second Commandment.³⁷ Without faith it does not call upon God, nor expect anything from God, nor bear the cross, but seeks, and trusts in, man's help.³⁸ And thus, when there is no faith and trust in God all manner of lusts and human devices rule in the heart.³⁹ This is why Christ said in John 15:5, “Without me you can do nothing;”⁴⁰ and the Church sings:

Lacking your divine favor,
There is nothing found in man,
Nothing in him is harmless.

Summary of Article XX

Introduction: Faith does not make good works superfluous but rather drives the believer to do good works.

- I. Only through faith are we reconciled with God. 9-14.
- II. This doctrine brings the greatest consolation. 15-22.
- III. Faith is trust and confidence in Christ's salvation. 23-26.
- IV. Good works result from faith to the glory of God. 27-34; cf. Art. VI. .

Conclusion: Faith does not prohibit good works but rather produces them. 35-40.