

BELGIC CONFESSION - ARTICLE 24

Man's Sanctification and Good Works

We believe that this true faith, produced in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, regenerates and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life and freeing him from the bondage of sin.¹ Therefore it is far from being true that this justifying faith makes men careless towards a pious and holy life, but on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation.² Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith as is called in Scripture a faith working through love,³ which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word. These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by His grace; yet they do not count towards our justification.⁴ For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works;⁵ otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good.⁶

Therefore we do good works, but not for merit (for what can we merit?)—rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do and not He to us, *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*⁷ Let us therefore keep in mind what is written: *when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'*⁸

In the meantime we do not deny that God rewards our good works, but it is through His grace that He crowns His gifts.⁹ Moreover, though we do good works, our salvation is not founded upon them; for we cannot do any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment;¹⁰ and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus, we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be continually tormented if they did not rely on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior.

Verses for Consideration

1. Romans 10:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Romans 6:4, 22
2. Titus 2:11–12
3. Galatians 5:6
4. 2 Timothy 1:8–9
5. Romans 4:4–5
6. Matthew 7:17
7. Philippians 2:13
8. Luke 17:10
9. Matthew 25:34–35
10. Isaiah 64:6

Questions for Consideration

1. Since we are no longer under the bondage of sin does this mean we are no longer bound to anything or anyone?
2. Since we are justified from original sin and actually sin, does this mean we can do whatever we want?
3. Whose works count towards our justification?
4. Do good works matter? Why or why not?