

URSINUS ON GOOD WORKS

(from his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism)

Catechism Question 91: But what are good works? **Answer:** Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory, and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.

I. GOOD WORKS ARE TO BE DONE *IN RESPECT TO GOD.*

1. That the glory of God our heavenly Father, may be manifested.
2. That we may render unto God the obedience which he requires, or on account of the command of God.
3. That we may thus render unto God the gratitude which we owe unto him. “It is just and proper that we should love, worship and reverence him by whom we have been redeemed, and from whom we have received the greatest benefits, and that we should declare our love and gratitude by our obedience and good works.”

II. GOOD WORKS ARE TO BE DONE *ON OUR OWN ACCOUNT.*

1. That we may thereby testify our faith, and be assured of its existence in us by the fruits which we produce in our lives. It is by our good works, therefore, that we know that we possess true faith, because the effect is not without its own proper cause, which is always known by its effect.
2. That we may be assured of the fact that we have obtained the forgiveness of sins through Christ, and that we are justified for his sake. “Justification and regeneration are benefits which are connected and knit together in such a way as never to be separated from each other.”
3. That our faith may be exercised, nourished, strengthened and increased by good works.

4. That we may escape temporal and eternal punishment. “If God did not desire that the hope of reward, and the fear of punishment should be moving causes of good works, he would not use them as arguments in the promises and **threatenings** which he addresses unto us in his word.”

III. GOOD WORKS ARE TO BE DONE *FOR THE SAKE OF OUR NEIGHBOR.*

1. That we may be profitable unto our neighbor, and edify him by our example and godliness.
2. That we may not be the occasion of offences and scandal to the cause of Christ.
3. That we may win the unbelieving to Christ.

Ursinus: “How can our works please God, since they are only imperfect? If our works were not pleasing to God, they would be performed to no purpose. We must, therefore, know in what way it is that they please God. As they are imperfect in themselves, and defiled in many respects, they cannot of themselves please God, Yet they are, nevertheless, acceptable to God in Christ the Mediator, through faith, For just as we ourselves do not please God in ourselves, but in his Son, so our works being imperfect and unholy in themselves, are acceptable to God on account of the righteousness of Christ, which covers all their imperfection or impurity, so that it does not appear before God. It is necessary that the person who performs good works should be acceptable to God; then the works of the person are also accepted; As now the person is acceptable to God, so are the works. ... It is for this reason that God is said to have had respect to Abel and his *offering*, that is, in his Son, in whom Abel believed; for it was by faith that he presented his sacrifice. (**Gen 4:4; Heb 11:4.**) So Christ is also called our *High Priest*, by whom our works are offered unto God.