

"Of Good Works" part 2 WCF 16.1.1–2, Man Cannot Define Good Works

2021.09.26 Sabbath School Lesson

Hopewell ARPC, Culleoka, TN

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WCF 16.1 (TPH p928)

I. Good works are only such as God hath commanded in His holy Word,^(a) and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intention.^(b)

^(a) Micah 6:8; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 13:21.

^(b) Matt. 15:9; Isa. 29:13; I Pet. 1:18; Rom. 10:2; John 16:2; I Sam. 15:21, 22, 23.

Hebrews 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.²² And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.

Matthew 15:3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

⁵ But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"—⁶ then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

⁷ Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

⁸ *'These people draw near to Me with their mouth,*

And honor Me with their lips,

But their heart is far from Me.

⁹ *And in vain they worship Me,*

Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

Isaiah 29:9 Pause and wonder!

Blind yourselves and be blind!

They are drunk, but not with wine;

They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink.

¹⁰ For the LORD has poured out on you

The spirit of deep sleep,

And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets;

And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers.

¹¹ The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please."

And he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed."

¹² Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying,

"Read this, please."

And he says, "I am not literate."

¹³ Therefore the LORD said:

"Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths

And honor Me with their lips,

But have removed their hearts far from Me,

And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

¹⁴ Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work

Among this people,

A marvelous work and a wonder;

For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,

And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden."

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording referenced above)

Let's begin with prayer. Let's pray.

Our father, we praise you. For you are good and you do good. And you define what is good. And we ask for the help of your spirit. Now, as we open your word, not only that, we might have clearer or firmer understanding of what good works are, but that we might also be built up by your word, that your spirit would use the word as a means, by which we grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ.

So that we will do that good which you prepared beforehand. So that when you create a new made us your workmanship in redemption that we would walk in those good works. So help us. Lord. Now we ask in this hour and Jesus name. Amen. All right. We're almost done with the first half of the paragraph that beginning of West Michigan fashion.

16 paragraph is a whole is good. Works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy word and not such as without the warrant there of or devised by men out of blind zeal or upon any pretense of good intention. So we reconsidered Micah 6 and Romans 12 last week for good works.

Our only such as God have commanded in his early word and one more verse Hebrews 13 verse 20 or rather verse 21 is the one that they footnoted but we will read verses 20 through 22 Hebrews 13, verse 23 through 22. Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting.

Covenant, make you complete in every good work to do. His will working in you. What is well, pleaseing in his sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. And I appeal to you brethren bear with the word of exhortation for, I have written to you.

In few words, last verse there, just because the phrase word of exhortations, first and early second century name for a sermon. You get the idea that this was originally the word preached and he condensed it down and it could have been multiple sermons. But he condensed it down to write it to them.

And the reason that he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is said that they will know God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and what God has done for them in his covenant, with them through Jesus Christ. But the part that occupies our attention for the purposes of good works are only such as God is commanded in.

His only word is verse 21, that may he make the God of peace, etc. Make you complete in every good work or make you perfect and every good work to do, his will working in you what is well pleaseing in his sight. So it's hopefully, if we've understood the doctrine of the confession up until this point, the doctrine of scripture that the confession summarizes up into this point, we'll know that we can't do any good from ourselves for ourselves apart from Christ.

The Bible says, or about ourselves apart from Christ. The Bible says there is no one who does good. So, if God is the one who has to create you new, if God is the one who prepares a good works beforehand for you to walk in them, it seems obvious.

Or it would seem obvious that God alone defines what those good works are if you can't do good works apart from Christ. Then God is the one who is working in you and does he work in you? What is well, pleasing in your sight? Of course not he works in us what, as well pleaseing in his sight and that becomes for you, then who trust in Jesus.

And you have forgiveness in him and now you love him and you want to do that, which brings glory to him as you search the scriptures to find out how he says to live and how he says to think you can know that the one who gave you his definition of good works.

Is also working in you according to his own definition that breaks down. If we let men, tell us what good works are apart from God because even if it were possible that men could come up with good works, apart from God, and we're about to find out that that's actually wicked and a form of judgment upon men and especially upon the church.

When the church slides into that kind of thinking, even if it were possible for men to define what good works were apart from God, you don't have any power to do them because the only ability we have for doing good, works comes from God and he's working according to his definition, not ours.

Yes, David.

Yes, and so far as God is glorified in his common, grace, by enabling them, to do things that have outward conformity to his law, by the law, by the light of nature, and God uses them to do. Good, even by means of that outward conformity, or sometimes, even in their resisting him.

But, no, because only that, which proceeds from faith and is done out of love for God is actually in and of itself, virtuous or good. So it's a it's a complex question or maybe a simple question but it's a, it's a complex answer as I'm reading. And Daniel Devik Nagar and Darius after they had their dreams.

He says they both glorified an honored. God. And I don't think that was through their inactivity, I think they purpose needs did those things. Well, now you've got language issue there. Often all that means is that they lifted up the name of God and that's not necessarily out of out of faith.

It's kind of like the Queen of Sheba who made no confessions of Yahweh for herself, but he, she did offer, praise to the name of Yahweh who had raised up such a king as Solomon, because he must really really love his people to to give them a king. Like this kind of like presidential proclamations of thanksgiving up until the point that they stopped mentioning God altogether.

So those presidential cit proclamations may nature where as your case have never connected various. I mean, these guys, I think when people Daniel was spared, you know, when he told all people to worship the daughter and then it was never teaser. I mean, it seems like it was very purposeful and meaning in their lives.

Okay. Well, we can't spend too much more time on it but in, in those cases they weren't they weren't making worship to y'all exclusive. They were just recognizing that y'all. I did a really good job. He's really glorious here. He may even be above all the rest of the gods, but they were authorizing inclusion in the pantheon and I mean there is some sincerity are authenticity without conversion, you know.

We've anyway, we don't have that that's a little bit of any trail and we are going to get to that question again. Later in the chapter, where good works. Come from. The good works are only such as God has commanded in his only word. So, if God is the one who works in us, then as verse 21 proceeds to say he works in us that which is well pleasing in his sight.

So that's the positive. Good works are only such as God have commanded in his holy word, but there's also the negative it mean and the negative, if you haven't only, if they're only what God says, and they're not what anyone else says, unless they say it from what God says, and that's what the second half of the paragraph says, and not such as without the warrant there of are devised by men at a blind zeal or upon any pretense of good intention.

And so, when we start in Matthew 15 for that, this is Jesus interacting with the Pharisees who are hears me who are astonished that the disciples eat without without washing their hands. Now for them it wasn't because you know you might you might get a disease. It was something that they thought honored God and you know, recognizing that your hands are unclean and you can actually do such a thing.

And in a anyway. The it was something that they had made up. And so Jesus answered and said to them, verse three, why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition for God commanded saying, honor your father, and your mother. And he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.

But you say, whoever says to his father or mother, whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God, then he need not honor his father or mother. Thus, you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition hypocrites. Well, did Isaiah prophesy about you saying these people drawn near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

And in vain, they worship me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Now, this actually is very important for a bunch of us in the room because we still live at home with Mom and Dad, who though, whom the Lord has set over us. And as you as you grow in love for Jesus, and as you grow in wanting to honor him, one of the things that our remaining sin can do, is, it can deceive us into thinking that dishonoring or rebelling against mom.

And dad is out of some, some desire to be spiritual or holy, and we have to be very careful that whatever we do. And especially if we think that we are going to resist, mom, and dad is because God has directly commanded what we do now. These people were saying I had designated what I was going to use in order to take care of mom and dad.

I designated it to the temple and therefore out of this desire to or a designated it to God out of this desire to to give for the glory of God for the worship of God. And so forth they had made this pledge, but God had already pledged their money because he told them to honor their father and their mother.

And so, coming up with this, this pledge drive money, as if it were a command of God, put them in a place where when they needed to honor their father or mother, they did not honor their father or mother now, here's how seriously God takes honoring your father and your mother children.

Because the Lord, Jesus also quotes, he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. They think Jesus takes. Do you think God takes honoring your father or your mother? Seriously he does. It's part of his holy law. He's the one who set mom and dad over you.

And when you disobey or disowner, you or mom or dad and they're gonna discipline you for it. One of the things that you will often or sometimes here, hopefully from them, is you know, what, you actually deserve for disobeying me what you actually deserve for. Dishonoring me is to go to hell to be punished inside and outside forever and ever inside Jesus describes it like worms eating you from the inside out outside.

Jesus describes it like fire burning you from the outside in forever and ever. That's what we deserve now. The discipline that I'm giving you that reminds you of what we deserve, but more than that, it points you to Jesus because I discipline you not with my discipline. But Jesus says to give you the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

And that's because he died for sinners, and he took our forever from the inside and forever from the outside punishment on himself. And the one who took that punishment on himself, has said that he uses the discipline that we give you to point you to him, to trust in him to be glad that he took the punishment for you and to let and to make you trust in him and love him and want to obey him.

Well in within all that you hear, we deserve hell, we deserve hell for the sin that we commit of dishonoring, father, or mother. We deserve hell for any of our sins whatsoever. And so when we teach as good works, that which man has come up with apart from God, we put ourselves in competition with what God says are.

Good works. And when we reduce our respect for what God says, good works are then we are not treating good works and obedience to God's law or disobedience to God's law with the seriousness that God does. Now, this was something that God gave his people over to, for a time in Isaiah or at least Isaiah's prophesying about it, which is where that last part comes from.

These people draw near me with their mouth and honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me and in vain, do they worship me teaching as doctrines? The commandments of men? And in the book of Isaiah, it describes God hiding from the teachers of the church, the word of God itself.

So it if the teachers of the church, don't understand the word of God, and if they're not teaching the word of God, if the preachers don't understand the word of God and they're not preaching the word of God. What we see in Isaiah is, that's actually a judgment that God gives so that when we know longer have God's commandments to teach and to preach longer have God's gospel to teach and to preach, Then you have blind people teaching and preaching blindness and the worship becomes useless and defensive to God, and the obedience becomes useless and offensive to God.

That's one of the reasons why it's so important for us us who are in teaching offices to understand the scriptures correctly and to teach the scriptures and to preach the scriptures. That's why when you pray for yourself and for your own spiritual care, one of the things you pray for.

I hope is that God would help the elders and God would help the pastor the preacher to preach and teach only according to the Word of God. So, let's see what he is saying. Here We just have verse 13 in. The footnote Isaiah 29. But we're going to read from verse 9 to 14.

Pause and wonder blind yourselves and be blind. They are drunk but not with wine. They stagger but not within toxicating. Drink for alway has poured out on you, the spirit of deep sleep and has closed your

eyes, namely the prophets and has covered your heads. Namely the seers, the whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed which men deliver to one who is literate saying read this please and he says, I cannot for it is sealed.

Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate saying, read this please. And he says, I'm not literate. Therefore the Lord said in as much as these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me and their fear toward me is taught by the commandment of men.

Therefore behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people a marvelous work and to wonder for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden. So there's a, the people are still drawing near with their mouths and honoring God with their lips, but there are unable to draw near to God, genuinely from the heart.

Why? Because their fear of God, their worship of God, their submission, to God, their obedience to God is being taught, not by the words of the book, but by the commandment of men, it's there's a couple of pictures here. The the first is the guy who's staggering drunk except for, he's not drunk, but he's not putting his feet, he doesn't know where to put his feet.

Every time he picks his foot up to put it in the next place's foot should go. It goes off to this side or it goes off to that side and if you're watching him from far away, you would say that man has abused alcohol. He can't even walk straight but God is saying that when we are the ones who are deciding what good works are.

We don't walk straight. We kind of have this general idea of where we should go, but we we can't walk straight and then he switches, he switches the image to a book and you, you hand them a book but the book is sealed tight. Can't get it open and you can't read it and then you hand it to a guy who can't read it all and he can't tell you what's in it.

And so they have the words of God. But it has like to it is to them like a book that is sealed or a book that is being read by an illiterate person. It is possible to have the Bible. It is possible to be in churches where you say, you are teaching and preaching the Bible.

But unless God himself gives the teacher and the preacher, the ability to understand the word life and light for their mind and submission to Christ to understand the word and teach it in preaching. Then what will be taught as not the word of God, even if you have the book in your hand, what will end up?

Being taught is the commandments of men. And God will say, even if you think you're praising him, even if you think you're serving in, if it's not actually according to what is written in the Bible, then it is not good works. It is not acceptable to God.

Okay. First, Peter won.

The footnote we have is for verse 18. Knowing that you we're not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver, or gold from your aimless conduct to received by tradition from your fathers but we'll place it in its context starting in verse 13. Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and rest.

Your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children not conforming yourselves to the former lusts as in your ignorance, but as he who called you is, holy you also be holy and all your conduct because it is written be holy for.

I am only and if you call on the father who without partiality, judges, according to each one's work, conduct yourself throughout the time of your stay here in fear knowing that you are not redeemed with corruptible things like silver, or gold from your aimless, conduct received by tradition from your father's, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb, without blemish and without spot, He indeed was for ordained before the foundation of the world.

But was manifest in these last times. For you who through him, believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. So we could look at, you know, good works our only such as God has commanded the positive part and a lot of this text right as obedient children.

What do obedient children do? Do, they do what they come up with to do? No, they do. What mom and dad said to do and perhaps in some of and some of your households, one child has admonished the other on occasion or maybe on many occasions who told you to do that, or we could look at because he is holy that we are to be holy too, we're children and we're children of a father, we should be like our father but the focus.

And as we look for how this is teaching us, not such as without the warrant there of or devised by men out of blind zeal or upon any pretense of good intention, the focus is on from what we were redeemed. Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold from your aimless, conduct received by tradition from your fathers.

So one of the things we need to be redeemed from one of the things that the redemption is so costly that it comes verse 19, by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb with that blemish and without spot. What was there such a high price to redeem us from?

That that it had to be.

Paid by Jesus precious blood.

Aimless conduct received by tradition from your father.

It's kind of.

It's similar to when Hebrews repentance from dead works.

You see, we.

Can think that things are.

Good, but if they're not the things that God has commanded his obedient children.

If they're not the things that come from the holy character of God the Father to be revealed in his children.

If instead of what God has commanded, we define good works as those things that we have come.

Up with

Those works first. Peter 118 says, are actually things we need to be redeemed from.

They are so bad in the sight of God that it costs the blood of Jesus Christ to redeem us from them.

So for instance.

This is just a I think the most prominent example in our current experience in the churches where they are are teaching this.

Critical race theory and or just critical theory, not even the racial part.

The idea that authority itself is evil and you need to continuously have these these revolutions to come to where we all have equal outcomes, which of course is impossible.

Or, or repenting and restoring for things.

That was really not even even provable, but that people did many generations ago, and we're not actually, you know, finding out who anyone descendants are.

It's just.

It's just a way for one group to attack another, but when stuff like that starts to seep into the church, you don't just have good works that God has commanded and lesser good works.

That man is coming up with.

If man comes up with something that he calls good.

To do apart from God.

Then those things are things that God hates so much that Jesus had to die on the.

Cross for them.

So we.

Need to be very careful about coming up with our own rules or not careful about it.

Just we're careful against it.

Coming up with our own rules as to what our good works.

If we define as good works anything other than what God has commanded.

And applying what God has commanded.

Then what we are doing are the kinds of things that we had to be redeemed from, not with corruptible things like silver or gold.

But with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

I think.

I think we'll stop there for this week.

Are there any?

This is very kind of.

It's not very concrete today, I don't think.

I'm trying to come up with more examples of what we're doing.

Yes, Justin.

Sounded on how this would time.

For a little principle.

Sure, that's that's that's the main thing as far as.

Matthew 15 and Isaiah 29 are concerned.

Worship is at the center.

Because God is God and he only can define what good works are.

And because the best work is to worship him and he only can define what worship is if you do anything.

And in the worship of God other than what he has said to do, it's not just not as good.

It is directly offensive to God.

It it puts you in a position where you're defining worship instead of him.

And even worse, since in worship he gives himself to us and commands us to offer ourselves unto him, and he's chosen a particular way to give himself to us.

Then we come in a different way.

What we are getting is not him.

Because only he can give himself.

To you, he's he's.

God, you can't reach up to him.

You can't get to him on the mountain.

You can't get to him at the temple.

You can only you can only get him in the ways that he has given himself to us.

So if we come in some other way than he is given.

We're actually coming for someone or something other than him.

If you look when Moses is about.

To repeat the.

Law in Deuteronomy 5.

If you look at Deuteronomy 4, God spends a fair amount of the text there on how when they came to the mountain they heard a voice.

They didn't see an image.

Why, because God decided to give himself to them by means of a voice, not by means of an image.

And that's why the second commandment has attached to it.

That that God punishes them that hate him.

Because if you come to God.

In some other way than he's given you to come to him.

Then you.

Are despising him himself, which is what you get in the ways he has said to worship and instead of him himself you're doing something else in worship or you're getting something else in worship.

So that's the logic of of Deuteronomy 4 expounding on and we we can mean.

Well or we can be very sincere.

But if it's not commanded by God, it's directly offensive to him.

The other.

Any other questions?

Yes, Dave.

It's not commanded by God.

So if we translate that into worship, then all practices that people integrate.

And I'm not arguing.

For against it I'm just saying that those.

Then those things are offensive to.

God in other.

Words when you don't.

The physical church.

Go to Baptist Church lady.

Right?

Yes, Sir.

Yes, they are.

It's the the great comfort of a Christian that he comes through the blood and the righteousness of Jesus and the mediation of Jesus.

Because that is how God brings us to himself the the fuller, richer as we understand in the New Testament that which is said more clearly is that if you come in ways other than what God has commanded, it's the same.

Is coming without Jesus?

And then when you you more fully realize that Jesus is the one who leads his people worship from heaven.

Then there's worship that participates in what Jesus is leading.

He's our high priest and he has.

He is the one who is gathering.

His people to God.

When those things that he has commanded participate in that.

But if you are doing things that God has not commanded, then you're coming not only in a different way, but now since you know the way is through Christ.

Really it's coming without Christ.

Now you could be a believer and be making mistakes and clinging to Christ, and I hope even when we are worshipping as well as we know.

According to the Word of God, I hope that none of us ever thinks the reason what we are about to do in the next building is acceptable.

Is because we have figured out the right way to do it and we are going to do it exactly right according to that way.

The reason is is except.

Is because God has provided in Jesus Christ the righteousness that makes it acceptable, and atoning sacrifice for everything that we do that is wrong and sinful.

Whether that would be to include a wrong element or as all of us I'm sure, are going to do.

Not offering ourselves up as wholeheartedly as we ought to, and having divided minds and attentions and desires as we do it, that too is offensive to God.

But you know the believer who's clinging to Christ doesn't cling to Christ and say, well, since I'm coming through Christ, I could do whatever I want.

That's not the attitude or desire that the Holy Spirit produces in a person.

And if you come with that attitude or desire, you should not.

Let yourself think that the Holy Spirit has produced in you clinging to Christ either.

The same spirit provided produces both the faith that clings to Christ and the desire to please him.

Yeah, it's it's.

It's a very grievous and sobering thing, isn't it?

To have to say.

There are all these branches of the visible church that have been doing all of these things for so long.

That are directly offensive to God.

And yet one of the things that you know, part of what you come.

Away with is.

I don't want to do those things.

I don't want to offer worship that's offensive to God, but another thing that you come away with is how marvelous is the righteousness and sacrifice of of Christ.

That that he could atone even for that.

How marvelous.

Is the patience.

Of God with such unreformed massive impurity in his church.

And many of those things he's even blessed through.

You know some of the preachers from past centuries that I have been most blessed by our men like JC Row.

Who was an Anglican man?

Jim Packer was Anglican.

Well was they don't have Anglicans in heaven.

Can you imagine thinking the crown is the defender of the faith in heaven?

Well, the crown is, it's just not the Crown of England.

Who would ever question?

Luther is a great example of a mixture of that which is godly and that which is not.

He is who he is, another one through whom we have been much blessed and that God raised up to throw off from.

Alright, now we're over.

Let's spray.

Our father in heaven, one of the things that we have realized as we have thought about.

These things from your word.

Is that we are far too gentle and accepting of things that come from ourselves instead of from you.

So I pray that you would help each one of us by your spirit.

To attend upon your word and that you would use it in that living and active way.

Uhm, that.

Discerns even the thoughts and intentions of our hearts and lays us all bare before you.

Grant that we would be able by your spirit to see anything that we thought was a good work.

Anything that we thought was out of zeal for you.

But was mixed with or even came from that which comes from us.

And as we see those things grant to us from Christ.

Desire to eliminate and destroy any idea of what a good work is that doesn't come from you doesn't come from your word that doesn't come by your spirit.

We thank you for Christ.

We thank you that he not only understood perfectly exactly what your word calls a good work, but that he also perfectly did.

All of those good works.

Thank you for making him our righteousness.

Thank you for counting his obedience as our obedience.

Thank you for atoning for all our disobedience by his precious blood.

And so we thank you in his name and we pray that you would help us as we go next door to worship that we would worship through him alone.

For we ask that too.

In his name, Amen.