Life in Christ is Fruitful

Text: Matthew 7:17a

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**Scriptures:** John 15:1-9; Matthew 7:15-23

Songs Chosen: [SttL] 174, 116, 501, 274, 23, 531+532

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (LD32 Q&A86)

Theme: Good works flow out from those who have faith in Christ

Proposition: There are good reasons to be godly!

*“So, every healthy tree bears good fruit" (Matt 7:17a)*

**Introduction**

What must you **do** to be saved? The answer depends on who you ask! Many who think that they understand the Christian faith will answer – ‘be a good person’. Followers of Islam would point you to the five pillars: a system of works which, in their view, increases the probability of being right with God. The Hindu would tell you to work within the death-reincarnation cycle so that you are in a better position in your next life

Biblically grounded believers in Christ know that the true faith is exclusive: there is only way to God and it is **not** by doing good works. As the Lord Jesus Christ said "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).* Christianity is the only religion where the works of the descendants of Adam do not contribute to salvation: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Eph 2:8).

If salvation is entirely God’s work, due to no merit of our own, then why bother being godly, why do “good works”? Why not do the sinful things that our fallen nature desires? Many have posed this question. For example, The Apostle Paul asks “*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?*” (Rom 6:1); The Roman Catholic church thought: “If salvation by faith alone is taught people will lead careless, wicked lives” and then fought against the Protestant Reformation.

Perhaps you have asked this question: Why bother sacrificing for a tithe? Why bother actively serving in Cadets and GEMS, youth group, session, ladies fellowship, missions committee, as a musician with regular practice each week? Why bother experiencing the embarrassment/rejection of sharing the gospel openly with your neighbours/workmates? Why bother being godly if you’ve got your “ticket to heaven”, you’ve done your Profession of Faith and “you’re in”?

Following the pattern of HCLD32, we’ll answer the question “Why then must we still do good?” in three parts:

1. Because we are saved for good works
2. Because we are assured by good works
3. Because we testify through good works
4. **Saved for Good Works**

A key question to begin with is: what does it mean “to do good”? Good works, in the Biblical sense of the term, originate from God and are done in His power as described in Philippians 2:13 “*for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*”. Good works that we do are not really our own works. They are the works that the Holy Spirit works in us. To put this another way, good works are the fruit of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Apart from Christ we cannot do these good works. As Jesus explains"*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit,* ***for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*** Good works are just not possible if you are not a Christian.

But what about labours such as these: Médecins Sans Frontières – international medical aid to 3rd world, voluntary work in the community; for example -helping out at a hospice, making donations to charities like World Vision or Tear Fund, cleaning the church, or make coffee after the worship service? These acts, although of benefit to others, are not inherently godly, they are **not** what the Bible means by “good works” if they are not a fruit of the Holy Spirit within.

Apart from Christ, they are not good in God’s sight, because they are always imperfect and, apart from Christ’s perfect work on our behalf they are unacceptable to God. “*For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment*” (Isaiah 64:6). Just as healthy, vigorous fruit trees produce good fruit, So, likewise spiritually healthy people saved by grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone, produce good works as they work out the love which God has first worked in them. This is what our Lord Jesus Christ states in Matthew 7:17 “*Every good tree bears good fruit*”.

Just as the purpose of a fruit tree is to produce fruit, so the purpose of being saved from sin in Christ is to do the same:(Christ Jesus) “*gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds*” (Titus 2:4); “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus* ***for*** *good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them*” (Eph 2:10).

Good works are not the basis of our salvation, but part of the goal. The goal of showing our thankfulness to God. As Jesus said "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). The goal of praising and pleasing God:“*So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Phil 2:12). We are saved for good works – this is in part why we must still do good, but we are also personally assured by them. Which brings us to our second point.

1. **Assured by Good Works**

If the tree is not producing valuable fruit, it’s no use for fruit production. You can tell whether it is “good tree” by the fruit. That is what our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 17:16 and 18: “*You will know them by their fruits*” "*A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit*”.

The Lord Jesus Christ makes clear that apart from God we cannot bear good fruit: "*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:4-5). To produce good fruit, we must have been grafted into Christ, Therefore, if we do produce such fruit, we must have been renewed by God. Good Works therefore help us in our walk with the Lord by being a basis for greater personal assurance of salvation.

Christian assurance is a ‘certainty of mind’ about one’s own personal salvation. As Paul writes to Timothy *“I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am* ***convinced*** *that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” (2 Tim 1:12b).* If we, and/or others, observe that we willingly and readily serve the Lord in ways which we would not do if we did not truly love Him, then we can detect evidences of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives

If we see an increase over time in some or all of the following: “moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love”, then this is evidence of our election by God to salvation. This is what Peter explains when he writes: “*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you, for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble*” (2 Peter 1:10)

The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks of the ‘fruits of assurance’: *It is the duty of everyone to be very diligent in making certain that God has called and chosen him. By such diligence his heart may grow in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties which obedience of God requires – the proper fruits of assurance*” (WCF 18.3).

Do you ever doubt that **you** are a child of God? Do you ever doubt that Christ died for **your** sins? Do you doubt that **you** will live forever in the new heavens and new earth? Pray that God would give you the heart to desire to be zealous for good works. Brothers and sisters, good works are a source of increased assurance for us; they are also a testimony to others…which brings us to our final point.

1. **Testifying through Good Works**

You don’t need to have an in-depth knowledge of fruit trees to tell the difference between an apple, a pear and an orange tree. The simplest way to distinguish between them is to observe them when they have fruit on their branches.

This principle was no different 2000 years ago in Israel: Our Lord Jesus Christ says twice in Matt 7 (verses 16 and20): “*You will know them by their fruits*”. The way we live, the priorities we display in our lives, the words which we speak all give an indication of what is inside us. At times we can mask this, but often under pressure or when we are caught off guard, what is inside us comes to the outside. Jesus wisely said "*What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person*." (Mark 7:20-23).

The reverse is true when good works coming out from a changed heart give testimony to God’s transformation grace and demonstrate a measurable progress in Christ-like character. When we do good works, our neighbours (those who live their lives around us) see something different about us. We produce a different kind of fruit to the unbelieving world because we are a different kind of ‘tree’.

When we become a living testimony, Christ describes us as lights: *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:14-16)*

So there are many good reasons to do good works, in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism: “*We do good because Christ by His Spirit is also renewing us to be like Himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all He has done for us, and so that He may be praised through us. And we do good so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits and so that by our godly living our neighbours may be won over to Christ*”.

Brothers and sisters in Christ “*Let the favourof the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!*” (Psalm 90:17)

AMEN.