**The Marrow of Modern Divinity**

Lesson 9 – The Law of Christ, Pt. 2

**Holiness & Good Works Attained Only by Faith**

1. The faith that we are given by God at conversion brings with it a knowledge that Christ has freely and fully justified me (declared me righteous in His sight) and has acquitted me of all my sins. Thus, we don’t avoid sin out of fear of eternal punishment and we don’t do good out of hope for eternal salvation. But, when we are saved, that new heart brings with it a desire to do what the Lord commands (obedience) and avoid what He forbids (disobedience).
2. Galatians 2:19-20 says, “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
3. Unbelievers, that is people still in the covenant of works, can have some element of outward obedience to the law of God, some outward appearance of holiness. A person can have head knowledge about the person and work of Christ and try to act upon that, without having been given a new heart. Judas appeared to be a genuine apostle just like the other 11. In the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, one if not two of the seeds does cause the plant to grow for a little while though they ultimately either wither or get choked out by weeds. Paul described himself according to the law as a covenant of works as “blameless” in Philippians 3:6. Thus, Evangelista says that “all the efforts of a man who is under the covenant of works are mere hypocrisy, because he pretends to serve God when he really intends to serve himself. Until a man is served by Christ, he will not serve the Lord Christ. Moreover, while he lacks true faith, he lacks the love of Christ, and therefore he lives not to Christ but to himself, because he loves himself.”
4. But when we are saved, God’s Spirit writes the law of love on our hearts so that we are enabled to work freely unto the Lord without the fear or compulsion of the law. Thomas Boston notes, “For a man under the covenant of works, the law compels him to obedience by the threat of punishment for his law-breaking and the promise of reward for his law keeping.” But a believer’s obedience is not compelled by law, but the love for God who has loved us in Christ Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.”
5. So Boston points out, “When once a man is brought into Christ, having the sanctifying Spirit of Christ dwelling in him, and being endowed with faith that purifies the heart, and with love that is strong as death, he is enabled to work freely and of his own accord, without that compulsion.” As William Tyndale puts it, “A Christian works only because it is the will of His Father; for after he is overcome with love and kindness, he seeks to do the will of God, which is indeed a Christian’s nature; and what he does, he does it freely after the example of Christ.” So it is only possible by those who have true, saving faith to truly pursue holiness and good works which is the will of God for us in Christ Jesus.

**Obedience Does Not Come from Slavish Fear or Servile Hope**

1. In other words, Christians do not avoid evil and do good out of fear of hell or hope to attain heaven by our good works. In this life, some people refrain from stealing, robbing, etc. for fear of being fined, imprisoned, or even given the death penalty. In this case, they are avoiding evil not out of love for Christ but fear of punishment and that is not sufficient for justification.
2. Zechariah prophecies under the Holy Spirit in Luke 1:74-75 that in Jesus we can serve God “without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.” Like in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, unbelievers attempt to approach the Father as servants, but in Christ, the Father makes us His children. So we serve Him as part of His family, rather than out of fear like the fear a servant has that if he makes a mistake he will be fired.
3. However the law and the threats of the law do serve as a mirror for us who are in Christ. Part of WCF 19.6 says, “….the threatenings of the law serve to show [believers] what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law [eternal death].” When we look at God’s law as Christians, we see what our sins truly deserve which increases our love and thankfulness to God in freeing us from what our sins truly deserve, but we also see the nature of God’s fatherly displeasure against His own children when they sin.
4. But we also do not pursue good and avoid evil in order to attain heaven by good works. This is the desire of those who seek utopia or heaven on earth. Unbelievers want a paradise-like environment, a place where there is no war but peace; a place where there is no misery but happiness; a place where there is nothing but pleasure. So Marxists think this will come by creating equal possessions for all people through government coercion. Buddhists think this will come by freeing one’s self from all desires until one reaches enlightenment (nirvana). Mormons and Muslims believe their good works will earn them a paradise with innumerable virgins. All people want to achieve heaven by their own good works as a reward for their good works.
5. But this is not the Christian’s approach. Our reward is God Himself. Psalm 73:25 says, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You.” Psalm 17:15 says, “As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with Your likeness.” The reward that awaits us we are not to think of as a reward for good works or the wages of a servant, but as the inheritance as sons. It is freely given to us by God who has adopted us into His family through Jesus Christ. So we don’t do good works to earn a reward or inheritance or heaven.
6. So the cause of our eternal happiness is not our heavenly inheritance, but God Himself. Jesus says that He is the way, truth, and life (John 14:6). He is our life and the way to the Father, not our inheritance. And Colossians 2:6 says, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,” Christ is the road we walk upon as believers and that narrow road consists of good works and holiness which is enabled by Christ in us through the Holy Spirit.

**The Effectiveness of Faith for Holiness of Heart & Life**

1. The chief and foundational grace is faith from which proceeds our pursuit of holiness and doing good works. Romans 5:1 says, “Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 4:5 says, “And to the one who does not work [for salvation] but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.” Isaiah 26:3 says, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in You.”
2. It is from faith that we are able to patiently endure all troubles, to be content in any condition, be willing to suffer for Christ, to forgive those who sin against us, to do good to those who hate us, etc. Evangelista says, “ The more faith a person has, the less love he has for the world or the things that are in the world. The greater any man’s faith is, the more fit he is to die, and the more willing he is to die.” Faith is the ground spring for all other Christian duties. So Thomas Boston notes, “No efforts whatsoever will truly sanctify a person without faith. However, such efforts are necessary to promote and advance the sanctification of the soul by faith.” John 6:28-29 demonstrates that faith is the root from which all other works proceed when it says, “They [the crowd] said to Him, ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”
3. Our sanctification and growth proceeds from faith and an increase of faith. One Puritan says, “If a man wants to go about the great work of changing his life, getting victory over sin so that it may have no dominion over him, having his conscience purged from dead works, and being made a partaker of the divine nature, let him not go about it by his own moral efforts nor consider what the commandments are and try to bring his heart to the perfection the law requires. Instead, let him go about it as a Christian. Let him believe the promise of pardon in the blood of Christ and the very believing of the promise will be able to cleanse his heart from dead works.”
4. And faith gets its effectiveness or efficacy from Christ Himself. Evangelista says, “Faith ingrafts a person, who is by nature a wild olive branch, into Christ, the natural olive tree. Then the ingrafted branch fetches sap from Christ as the root, and this makes it bring forth fruit in its kind. Indeed, faith fetches a supernatural efficacy from the death and life of Christ, by which it transforms the heart of a believer and creates and infuses into him new principles of living. We might even say that the treasure of all graces that Christ has stored up in Himself are drained by faith and drawn out for a believer’s use, being as a conduit, that waters all the herbs of the garden.”
5. The point in all this is that faith begins the process of sanctification for true believers as the tree comes before the fruit. The legalist wants to have the fruit before the tree and have sanctification before faith. The Antinomian does not want sanctification so has a bare and empty tree. Evangelista warns, “Do not any longer work to get an interest in Christ. Instead, believe that you have an interest in Christ so that you may work. Do not make the change of your life the ground of your faith.”
6. Calvin even says, “Those who think that repentance precedes faith instead of flowing from, or being produced by it, as the fruit by the tree, have never understood its nature.” So Evangelista warns against preachers [like in the Church of Scotland in Boston’s day] who do not tell people their sins are pardoned in Christ until they see some reform in the person’s life.
7. Many, including Roman Catholics, like to charge that this teaching enables Christians to go on sinning and walking in sin [antinomianism]. But this is blatantly untrue, because true Christians grow in holiness and as they grow in holiness, they produce more fruit. That fruit includes both more and more living unto holiness as well as more and more putting sin to death. Romans 7:6 says, “But now we are released from the law [as a covenant of works], having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit [10 commandments mediated through Christ] and not in the old way of the written code [as a covenant of works].”

**The Use of Means for Strengthening Faith**

1. So if faith is the ground spring for Christian duties born out of love because Christ has loved us first and given us the new heart to believe upon him, what can we do to increase our faith (or as the father in Scripture put it, help our unbelief)?
2. First, Evangelista tells us that we must pray. He says, “The best advice and counsel that I can give you is to exercise the faith that you have, wrestle against doubting, and sincerely ask God to increase your faith.” Luther points out, “Because this gift [faith] is in God’s hands, to bestow when and on whom he pleases, you must go to Him in prayer, saying with the apostles, ‘Increase our faith!’” (Luke 17:5).
3. Second, Evangelista tells us that we must be diligent in hearing the Word preached. He says, “Just as ‘faith comes from hearing’ (Romans 10:17), so also is it increased by hearing.”
4. Third, read Scripture and meditate upon the “free and gracious promises of God. For the promise is the immortal seed by which the Spirit of Christ begets and increases faith in the hearts of all His people.”
5. Finally, we must frequently come to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and receive it as often you can. The WLC #168 says that as we feed upon Christ’s body and blood spiritually by faith that the Spirit uses the sacrament to spiritually nourish us and grow us in grace, “have our union and communion with Christ confirmed; testify and renew their thankfulness and engagement [marriage] to God, and [testify and renew] their mutual love and fellowship each with the other, as members of the same mystical body.”
6. But it is not these means in and of themselves that grow our faith, but the Holy Spirit working through these means. Evangelista says, “While the means will not do it without the Spirit, neither will the Spirit do it without the means, when the means are available.” And through the Spirit working through these means to sanctify us, we are better equipped to live in submission to the Lord’s will and walk in a manner that pleases Him.