

# The Third Part

## OUR THANKFULNESS

### *Lord's Day 32*

86. **Q.** *Since we have been delivered  
from our misery  
by grace alone through Christ,  
without any merit of our own,  
why must we yet do good works?*

**A.** *Because Christ,  
having redeemed us by His blood,  
also renews us by His Holy Spirit  
to be His image,  
so that with our whole life  
we may show ourselves thankful to God  
for His benefits,<sup>1</sup>  
and He may be praised by us.<sup>2</sup>  
Further, that we ourselves  
may be assured of our faith  
by its fruits,<sup>3</sup>  
and that by our godly walk of life  
we may win our neighbours for Christ.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 6:13; 12:1, 2; 1 Pet. 2:5-10.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 7:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-24; II Pet. 1:10, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 5:14-16; Rom. 14:17-19; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1, 2.

87. **Q.** *Can those be saved  
who do not turn to God  
from their ungrateful and impenitent  
walk of life?*

**A.** *By no means.  
Scripture says that no unchaste person,  
idolater, adulterer,  
thief, greedy person,  
drunkard, slanderer,  
robber, or the like  
shall inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5, 6; 1 John 3:14.

## LORD'S DAY 32

### THE RENEWAL OF OUR LIFE TO GRATITUDE

Text: Lord's Day 32  
Reading: Ephesians 2 : 1-10

Psalm 118 : 8  
Psalm 138 : 1  
Psalm 116 : 1, 2, 3, 4  
Psalm 116 : 9  
Hymn 25 : 1, 2, 3

Introduction: Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

hind our gratitude. I summarize this Lord's Day as follows:

In Lord's Day 32 we may begin with the third great theme of the Heidelberg Catechism, namely *gratitude*, and, of course, that theme is strongly related to the two previous chapters. Qu. 86 sums it up beautifully: we have been *delivered* from our *misery* in Christ! The great praise of the Church is: "I am O LORD, Thy servant, bound yet free, *redeemed by grace*" (Psalm 116, *Book of Praise*). At the same time, this then implies: "I'll render as a token of *gratitude* my constant praise to Thee".

Gratitude follows redemption and deliverance. That is the Biblical line in the order of salvation. The Word of God begins with speaking about our *creation*. We were created after the image of God to do good works in the presence of God and in this world. But we fell away from this origin into sinful rebellion against God. However, in His sovereign grace the Lord God sent His Son to work our deliverance, our redemption.

It is now from out of this redemption that *recreation* becomes possible. God will make all things *new*. There must be and there can be a new beginning in Christ, Who *renews* us to do good works in the presence of God and in the midst of men.

The key word in this Lord's Day is the word "renew". Christ, we read, also renews us by His Holy Spirit. He recreates us so that we begin to lead new lives as God's children. And that alone is the force be-

**Jesus Christ renews our entire life to gratitude.**

- 1. the great necessity of this renewal**
- 2. the prime purpose of this renewal**
- 3. the added blessings of this renewal.**

1. Let me just reflect for a moment on the words "recreation" and "renewal". We associate recreation with "free time", leisure, and the purpose of this leisure is to get new strength, to be renewed. Our depleted sources of energy must be replenished and restored.

Well, this notion is also behind the Biblical doctrine of renewal and recreation. Renewal is a *very necessary* thing in our lives. Our completely exhausted resources must be renewed. However, the reason for this renewal does not so much lie in ourselves, but in *our Lord Jesus Christ!* Gratitude is not something which we produce on our own, something that wells up from our heart. Of ourselves we would never sufficiently esteem God's work of salvation. Gratitude is something which Christ *works* in us. It is a part of *His* total plan of redemption. He has redeemed us; He also renews us! Every chapter of the Catechism—also this one—begins with Christ's initiative. He is the *first worker*. He works gratitude in us, and we must work it out!

The main question here is: why *must* we do good works? Notice what the Catechism says: we must do

good works! That is a Scriptural truth about which there is no debate in the Catechism. Let no one say that the necessity of good works is denied in the Reformed Churches.

We affirm the need for good works, indeed. But our motivation is quite different from most others. Many present their good works as a whole or a part of their own righteousness before God. Their works have a *self*-redeeming character. Their works are a matter of personal merit.

But the Catechism has cut off that route before and also cuts it off here. The Catechism says that we have been delivered from our misery by grace alone, without any merit of our own. This sentence is perhaps the most comprehensive formulation ever written of the Christian doctrine. We have also read this truth again in Ephesians 2: by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not because of works, lest anyone should boast!

So we must do good works, yes, but these works do not precede our salvation. Instead, they are a result of that salvation. The Catechism says: Christ, *having redeemed us* by His blood also renews us. There you have it again: the cross, the blood is our only redemption. That always comes first. And why, then, is there still the demand for good works? Because Christ does not stop at the cross. He has a continued plan of action for our lives!

The Catechism says that Christ *also renews us* by His Holy Spirit. Notice that word *also*, for it is vital here. Christ did one thing, but He *also* does something else. Do not restrict Christ's work only to the cross. He does more. He arose from the dead and ascended into heaven so that by the power of His Spirit He would *renew* us. Having redeemed us—once on the cross—He now also constantly renews us by His Spirit.

Renewing: this is the prime work and the official calling of the Risen Lord today. He is re-creating a new humanity which will live in good works and will be prepared for the new earth. In doing so, Christ is restoring us to our original task and purpose which we

had from the beginning at creation, namely, to serve God in perfect love and obedience, in good works! Now we must again live in righteousness and holiness before God and among men!

We admit that we cannot do this in ourselves. The cross does not undo our basic depravity and inability. Well then, says the Lord, I will enable you. I will renew your life, so that you can and will start living again according to your original purpose at creation, in good works.

To that end, the Lord poured out His Holy Spirit. This Spirit permeates the Church. He lives in the hearts of the believers, so that a people—dead in themselves—become alive in the Spirit, renewed, recreated, reactivated, and restored unto God!

And so we see the great necessity of this renewal. It had to come out of God. It never would have come out of us. But it lies in Christ's work. This renewal is bound to the fact of Pentecost, which in turn, is rooted in Golgotha. Christ works out His work of redemption in the renewal of our lives.

The power behind our good works is therefore not our own will, but the will of Christ and the Spirit's renewal of our will! God is recreating us. He forces us to walk in newness of life and in an abundance of good works. He is the spiritual power behind and in our good works!

I want you to note that this renewal follows a set pattern. The Catechism says: Christ renews us *to be His image*. You will remember that we were created after God's image, which means that we were created in righteousness and holiness. Now we are recreated to be Christ's image, for He has shown forth in this world God's righteousness and holiness. He preceded us in doing good works, and we may follow Him in these works. As a matter of fact, these are *His* works which we do, because He does them in us. We are created in Jesus Christ *for* good works, writes Paul in Ephesians 2, good works which God prepared *beforehand*, that we should walk in them!

So what do we have here in this first Lord's Day in the section of gratitude? We don't have a statement

about what we must do, as if we are now on our own. Instead, we find a joyous confession of what Christ is doing in us. Having been redeemed by Christ, we are now being renewed by Him. We do the works which He works in us. The Spirit motivates us to do so. This renewal could not come out of ourselves, and it does not come out of ourselves, but is Christ's ongoing work in us!

Here lies great comfort for us. Christ is renewing our life to meet the prime purpose for which we were created. It would never come from us, but now it does come in us through Him. We begin again to lead purposeful lives to God's glory. So we come to the second element.

2. As these good works are not from out of ourselves, they are not directed to ourselves either. They are directed only to God! As we begin this section on gratitude it is good to understand that good works do not function first as proof among men, but as a sacrifice to God. The Catechism says: "so that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for His benefits and He may be praised by us".

Christ renews us so that we may show gratitude *to God*. Our good works are first of all a means to glorify God, "that He may be praised by us". Gratitude and praise really belong together. If you begin to understand from what great danger, from what deadly curse you have been delivered, will you not praise the one who did this great work?

Sure, there is such a thing as lip-service. Some people praise others only to better themselves and some people want to serve God only for their own benefit only. But we learn here that real gratitude means a heart-felt appreciation to God for what He has done in Christ!

Do we really understand what has been done for us in Christ? That God went all the way in giving up His only Son to the death of the cross and the agony of hell for us? That we who were absolutely *dead* before Him, have now been made *alive*, as Paul writes to the Ephesians. We have come from death to life. This is

the greatest gift that anyone could ever receive. We have an eternal place with Christ in the heavens, writes Paul. Would all this not rightly cause us to abound in gratitude? Will our hearts and lips not open to the praise of Him Who gave us such rich and undeserved salvation?

The work of *creation* was in itself a mighty work. Out of nothing God called forth this world and formed His children, giving them a place with Him, calling them to live before Him gratefully in good works. But the work of *recreation* is even mightier. Through Christ, God calls those who are spiritually dead to new life, to a new service. In Christ He recreates a new humanity after the image of His Son, so that these new people will glorify Him and only Him, and do so with all their heart and strength!

What is the prime purpose of this renewal? Well, God wants the glory. He requires the recognition, the love, the trust, the fear, and the honour. He wanted this already at the beginning, at creation. To glorify God was not an option for Adam and Eve, but a sovereign and rightful demand of God Himself in His covenant. And now God wants this glory even more, in Christ. That is the demand of the new covenant! There is a new covenant and a new people, who have a new heart and sing a new song!

In order to receive all the glory, God did all the work! God's work of salvation in Christ is so perfect and complete that there is not one ounce of praise or glory for ourselves. No, all praise must go and does go to Him! The theme of the songs of the New Testament Church (think of the songs in the book Revelation) is: to Thee, O God, belongs all glory, and praise, and honour, forever, for Thou hast done all the work! Even our good works are Thy works, lest any man should boast in Thy presence, lest any man should boast in himself!

Oh, if we did a part of it, be it even a small and minute part, then also some of the praise would go to us. But God did all the work, in creation, in redemption, in recreation and renewal, He did it all in Jesus Christ, so that in Jesus Christ He would receive all the

glory. Indeed, all glory, laud and honour, to Thee, Redeemer King!

This is the unique beauty of the Reformed confession. I've said it before, and I'll say it again and again, that there is no confession but the *Reformed* confession which by God's grace comes to this Scriptural purity and height! This is what we have defended through the centuries over against Pelagians and Arminians who sought to reserve some glory for man and salvage some self-respect through self-justification. But the Churches have stood firm, and as long as we have this Catechism, we will stand firm here. We say that to God goes all the glory. To give that glory is the prime purpose of our lives and the essence of gratitude!

We must understand that this genuine gratitude, this Spirit-worked praise, is not just a matter of words. The Catechism emphasizes that "with our whole life we may *show* ourselves thankful to God". We are to show gratitude with our whole life. This means that in every activity, in every field of life, in our family, at work, in church, at school, on holidays, wherever and in whatever, during the day and at night, we live in such a way that God is glorified. *Showing ourselves grateful* is a matter of *activity*, of doing, of service which is seen. Our whole life, private and public, must be a monument to the Lord, testifying of His redeeming grace and renewing power! That is how deep and how far this section on gratitude goes!

In the first Lord's Day of this final section, the Catechism lays it all on the line. The Catechism teaches that God wants it all, that we must do all things to the glory of God in our entire life. That is the prime purpose of our renewal. And, I know, this is not easy for us. Yet it is essential. I know that because of our sinful nature there is much resistance in us against this process of renewal. And I know that we constantly seek our own glory. We have to fight this all our lives. But let us be grateful that Christ has begun also this work of glorifying God in us and through us, in our works and in our deeds, and that He allows us and others around us to reap the blessings of this renewal. So we come to the last point.

3. The Catechism mentions more to which we must pay some attention here. In answer 86 we read: "Further, that we ourselves . . ." etc. The word "further", indicates that there are some added *blessings* here of this renewal. The main thing, the prime purpose of this renewal is God's glory, but there are some further benefits to be noted!

There are indeed two added matters here. They are our own assurance and our neighbour's possible edification. We read: "Further, that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ".

It may seem a bit selfish to put ourselves here *before* our neighbours, but the matter is really quite simple and unpretentious. How could we ever hope to win our neighbour for Christ if we are not ourselves assured of God's redeeming grace and renewing power? If we do not see the power of the Spirit in our own life and find no fruits of faith in our lives, how will our neighbours ever see them?

Christians are to be a salting salt. Therefore, they must be assured of their faith by the fruits. In our own lives we are to see that Christ is at work in us. When we see the progress of faith, we will be all the more encouraged to glorify God in our associations with others. But if we live in sins, we only shame the Name of God. Our evil reputation will damage the cause of Christ and His Church! So these things are properly related in the Catechism.

The first blessing then is that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits. We do not mean self-assurance in the sense of self-confidence, as if it depends on what you find in yourself, but we mean an assurance which comes from experiencing the power of God in your life. You find that faith—which is a powerful gift of God—does have results, despite the many remaining shortcomings. You discover that faith is not an empty claim or a dead thing, but a powerful force, and that there is spiritual change and growth in your life!

Yes, we discover also in our own lives that God is mighty and gracious. I read it in the Bible, and I hear it

in the preaching, but I also *see* it in my life. Not that there is no stumbling. Not that I wouldn't like to see more fruits. Not that I am satisfied and become careless. No, not that! But I do see results, not my results, but God's results in me, which through faith become also my works, a part of me. So I discover, much to my delight and surprise, that through the Spirit I can and I do serve God. I have begun to glorify His Name here on earth!

God works this assurance in us. Christ gives us this added blessing. He does not want us to doubt His renewing power or the existence of our faith, but He wants us to be confident Christians, confident in Him and in the renewing power of His Spirit! The great blessing of doing good works is that through them God gives us joy, satisfaction, confidence, happiness, and strength.

When we harbour sins, when we become careless in God's service, when we do not pray unceasingly, and when we let the Satan gain influence over us, we lose this assurance.

But if we open our lives to the renewing power of the Spirit, seeking His Word, seeking God in prayer every day, then we will be a blessing not just to ourselves, but also to our *neighbours* around us!

We may be a blessing to others, at home, in the church, to family, to brothers and sisters in Christ. But beyond that, it may also be that by our godly walk of life we win our neighbours for Christ.

The Catechism does not say that we *will* win our neighbours for Christ. We should not have any undue

optimism here. We live in a world that has rejected God and which is hostile to the Word of God. But we may expect that God will bless our godly walk. The possibility is there that our neighbour is indeed won for Christ. He may be won after a long battle by our consistent example of Christian living. He may be won by the clear evidence of God's power in our lives, by seeing that we are different from those of the world!

When God renews us, He makes us instruments for the Gospel to win others. He sets His Church as a city on a mount and as a light on a candlestick. We are to be a monument to God and at the same time an instrument among men!

If we do not do good works, we hinder others from coming to Christ. So we may be guilty of the damnation of others. At the same time we jeopardize our own salvation. For the second question and answer of this Lord's Day emphasizes that we can not be saved if we lead ungrateful and impenitent lives. If we live in sin, we are not saved.

Here the Catechism touches on the seriousness of the matter and appeals to our responsibility. Christ is the One who renews us by His Word and Spirit. He wants it and He works it. That truth always stands. Otherwise, there is no hope at all. But we may not stand in the way of this renewing process with our wilful sins. We must let ourselves be renewed. We must let Christ work in us, and take pride in the fact that we are His workmanship. So we experience and share the blessing of this mighty renewal in Christ. AMEN.