

Formula of Concord, Epitome, IV. OF GOOD WORKS.

STATUS CONTROVERSIAE.

The Principal Question In the Controversy concerning Good Works.

1] Concerning the doctrine of good works two divisions have arisen in some churches:

2] 1. First, some theologians have become divided because of **the following expressions**, where the one side wrote:

A. *Good works are necessary for salvation.*

B. *It is impossible to be saved without good works.*

C. Also: *No one has ever been saved without good works.*

D. But the other side, on the contrary, wrote: *Good works are injurious to salvation.*

3] 2. Afterwards a schism arose also between some theologians with respect to **the two words necessary and free**, since the one side contended that the word *necessary* should not be employed concerning the new obedience, which, they say, does not flow from necessity and coercion, but from a voluntary spirit. The other side insisted on the word *necessary*, because, they say, this obedience is not at our option, but regenerate men are obliged to render this obedience.

4] From this disputation concerning the terms a controversy afterwards occurred concerning the subject itself; for the one side contended that among Christians **the Law should not be urged at all, but men should be exhorted to good works from the Holy Gospel alone**; the other side contradicted this.

At Issue:

1. Four Expressions
2. The words necessary and free
3. Exhort Christians to do good works by the law or the gospel?
(Answer: Art. VI. 3rd Use of Law)

AFFIRMATIVA.

Pure Doctrine of the Christian Churches concerning This Controversy.

5] For the thorough statement and decision of this controversy our doctrine, faith, and confession is:

6] 1. That **good works certainly and without doubt follow true faith**, if it is not a dead, but a living faith, as fruits of a good tree.

7] 2. We believe, teach, and confess also that **good works should be entirely excluded**, just as well in the

question concerning salvation as **in the article of justification before God**, as the apostle testifies with clear words, when he writes as follows: *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin*, Rom. 4, 6ff And again: *By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast*, Eph. 2, 8. 9.

8] 3. We believe, teach, and confess also that **all men, but those especially who are born again and renewed by the Holy Ghost, are bound to do good works**.

9] 4. In this sense the words *necessary, shall, and must* are employed correctly and in a Christian manner also with respect to the regenerate, and in no way are contrary to the form of sound words and speech.

1. Good Works follow faith
2. Good Works are excluded from justification.
3. All people (especially believers) are bound to do good works.
(It is necessary, shall, must...)

10] 5. Nevertheless, by the words mentioned, *necessitas, necessarium, necessity* and *necessary*, **if they be employed concerning the regenerate, not coercion, but only due obedience is to be understood**, which the truly believing, so far as they are regenerate, render not from coercion or the driving of the Law, but from a voluntary spirit; because they are no more under the Law, but under grace, Rom. 6, 14; 7, 6; 8, 14.

1. Believers are not coerced to do good works...
2. Believers do good works from a free spirit (not optional) and love of righteousness

11] 6. Accordingly, we also believe, teach, and confess that when it is said: **The regenerate do good works from a free spirit, this is not to be understood as though it is at the option of the regenerate man to do or to forbear doing good when he wishes, and that he can nevertheless retain faith if he intentionally perseveres in sins.**

12] 7. Yet this is not to be understood otherwise than as the Lord Christ and His apostles themselves declare, namely, regarding the liberated spirit, that it does not do this from fear of punishment, like a servant, but **from love of righteousness**, like children, Rom. 8, 15.

13] 8. Although this voluntariness [liberty of spirit] in the elect children of God is not perfect, but burdened **with great weakness**, as St. Paul complains concerning himself, Rom. 7, 14–25; Gal. 5, 17;

14] 9. Nevertheless, for the sake of the Lord Christ, the Lord does not impute this weakness to His elect, as it is written: *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*, Rom. 8, 1.

1. This Christian freedom is exercised **with great weakness!**
2. This weakness is not imputed to them.

15] 10. We believe, teach, and confess also that **not works maintain faith and salvation in us, but the Spirit of God alone**, through faith, of whose presence and indwelling good works are evidences.

1. The Spirit of God (and not works) keep us in faith and salvation.
2. Works are evidence of Faith

NEGATIVA. False Contrary Doctrine.

16] 1. Accordingly, **we reject and condemn the following modes of speaking:**

A. when it is taught and written that good works are necessary to salvation;

B. also, that no one ever has been saved without good works;

C. also, that it is impossible to be saved without good works.

17] 2. **We reject and condemn as offensive and detrimental to Christian discipline** the bare expression, when it is said:

D. Good works are injurious to salvation.

You can say “Good works are necessary,” but not “Good works are necessary for salvation.”

18] For especially in these last times it is no less needful to **admonish men to Christian discipline [to the way of living aright and godly] and good works,**

Admonish men to
1. Christians discipline and
2. Good works

and remind them how necessary it is that they exercise themselves in good works as a declaration of their faith and gratitude to God,

than **that the works be not mingled in the article of justification;**

Remind them that Good Works:
1. are a declaration of their faith
2. and gratitude to God
3. and not to be mingled in justification

because men may be damned by an Epicurean delusion concerning faith, as well as by papistic and Pharisaic confidence in their own works and merits.

Men can be damned by
1. Epicurean delusion
2. Papistic confidence

19] 3. We also **reject and condemn** the dogma **that faith and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost are not lost by willful sin,** but that the saints and elect retain the Holy Ghost even though they fall into adultery and other sins and persist therein.

Willful sin drives out
faith and the Holy Spirit

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, IV. OF GOOD WORKS.

7] First, there is no controversy among our theologians concerning the following points in this article, namely: **A. that it is God's will, order, and command that believers should walk in good works;** **B. and that truly good works are not those which everyone contrives himself from a good intention, or which are done according to traditions of men, but those which God Himself has prescribed and commanded in His Word;** **C. also, that truly good works are done, not from our own natural powers, but in this way: when the person by faith is reconciled with God and renewed by the Holy Ghost,** or, as Paul says, is *created anew in Christ Jesus to good works*, Eph. 2, 10.

8] Nor is there a controversy as to **how and why the good works of believers, although in this flesh they are impure and incomplete, are pleasing and acceptable to God, namely, for the sake of the Lord Christ, by faith, because the person is acceptable to God.**

For **the works which pertain to the maintenance of external discipline,** which are also done by, and required of, the unbelieving and unconverted, although commendable before the world, and besides rewarded by God in this world with temporal blessings, are nevertheless, because they do not proceed from true faith, in God's sight sins, that is, stained with sin, and **are regarded by God as sins** and impure on account of the corrupt nature and because the person is not reconciled with God. *For a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit*, Matt. 7, 18, as it is also written Rom. 14, 23: *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin*. For the person must first be accepted of God, and that for the sake of Christ alone, if also the works of that person are to please Him.

9] Therefore, of works that are truly good and well-pleasing to God, which God will reward in this world and in the world to come, **faith must be the mother and source; and on this account they are called by St. Paul true fruits of faith, as also of the Spirit. ...**

33] But when and in what way the exhortations to good works can be earnestly urged from this basis without darkening the doctrine of faith and of the article of justification, the *Apology* shows by an excellent model, when in Article XX, on the passage 2 Pet. 1, 10: *Give diligence to make your calling and election sure*, it says as follows: *Peter teaches why good works should be done, namely, that we may make our calling sure, that is, that we may not fall from our calling if we again sin. "Do good works," he says, "that you may persevere in your heavenly calling, that you may not fall away again, and lose the Spirit and the gifts, which come to you, not on account of works that follow, but of grace, through Christ, and are now retained by faith. But faith does not remain in those who lead a sinful life, lose the Holy Ghost, and reject repentance."* Thus far the *Apology*.

34] But, on the other hand, the sense is not that faith only in the beginning lays hold of righteousness and salvation, and then resigns its office to the works as though thereafter they had to sustain faith, the righteousness received, and salvation; but in order that the promise, not only of receiving, but also of retaining righteousness and salvation, may be firm and sure to us, St. Paul, Rom. 5, 2, ascribes to faith not only the entrance to grace, but also that we stand in grace and boast of the future glory, that is, the beginning, middle, and end he ascribes all *to faith alone*. Likewise, Rom. 11, 20: *Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith*. Col. 1, 22: *He will present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight, if ye continue in the faith*. 1 Pet. 1, 5, 9: *By the power of God we are kept through faith unto salvation*. Likewise: *Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls*.

35] Since, then, it is manifest from God's Word that **faith is the proper and only means by which righteousness and salvation are not only received, but also preserved by God**, the decree of **the Council of Trent**, and whatever elsewhere is set forth in the same sense, is justly to be rejected, namely, that our good works preserve salvation, or that the righteousness of faith which has been received, or even faith itself, is either entirely or in part kept and preserved by our works.

36] For although before this controversy quite a few pure teachers employed such and similar expressions in the exposition of the Holy Scriptures, in no way, however, intending thereby to confirm the above-mentioned errors of the Papists, still, since afterwards a controversy arose concerning such expressions, from which all sorts of offensive distractions [debates, offenses, and dissensions] followed, it is safest of all, according to the admonition of St. Paul, 2 Tim. 1, 13, to hold fast as well to *the form of sound words* as to the pure doctrine itself, whereby much unnecessary wrangling may be cut off and the Church preserved from many scandals.

37] Fourthly, as regards **the proposition that good works are said to be injurious to salvation**, we explain ourselves clearly as follows: If anyone should wish to drag good works into the article of justification, or rest his righteousness or trust for salvation upon them, to merit God's grace and be saved by them, to this not we say, but St. Paul himself says, and repeats it three times, Phil. 3, 7ff, that to such a man his works are not only useless and a hindrance, but also *injurious*. But **this is not the fault of the good works themselves, but of the false confidence placed in the works, contrary to the express Word of God**.

38] However, it by no means follows thence that we are to say *simpliciter* and flatly: *Good works are injurious to believers for or as regards their salvation*; for **in believers good works are indications of salvation when they are done propter veras causas et ad veros fines** (from true causes and for true ends), that is, in the sense in which God requires them of the regenerate, Phil. 1, 20; for it is God's will and express command that believers should do good works, which the Holy Ghost works in believers, and with which God is pleased for Christ's sake, and to which He promises a glorious reward in this life and the life to come....