

Augsburg Confession

Fall 2025

Session 12 – Article XX – Good Works

Review

- ❖ According to James 2:14-16 “Someone who says he believes in Jesus Christ and yet refuses to love his neighbor actually has a dead faith. Faith apart from works is no faith at all”
- ❖ James is talking about those already justified by grace. It matters because Christian's love. This is what Christians do. It is inconsistent with the Christian faith to say one believes in Christ yet hates his neighbor. We show others we believe by loving and serving our neighbor.
- ❖ **John 15:1-17**
 - Christ is the vine
 - His people are the branches
 - Eternally dead sinners are grafted into the vine in the waters of Holy Baptism.
 - We are fed with God's Word and the Lord's Supper. Apart from Word and Sacrament, the branch withers and dies.

Read Article 20 “Good Works” (pgs. 18-21)

Question 1 – *What is a Vocation? What are some of the Vocations you have filled in your life?*

Question 2 - *A Christian mother does not change her baby's diaper saying, "If I change my baby's diaper, this will be a good work toward God that He may love me more." Why does the Christian mother change her baby's diaper?*

Question 3 - *If we trust in our works for a good standing before God, what are we saying about Christ's work?*

Question 4 –*In order to rightly understand "good works," what needs to be understood first and foremost? (Article XX Lines 19-22)*

Question 5 - *How can we say good works are necessary in light of the doctrine of Christ and justification? (Read AC XX lines 27-34)*

Question 6 - *Lutherans are not against good works. Finish these two summaries of Luther's explanation of good works:*

"Good works are works that flow from faith and from the joy of heart that has come to us because we have forgiveness of sins through ____

"God does not need our good works, but our _____ does."

SCENARIO

Bob and Kathy Johnson have been your neighbors for over twenty years. Their children and yours have been best friends. When you had your third child, Kathy was there for you. When you had emergency surgery, Bob planted your crops. You were almost like family. After twenty years, Bob and Kathy have decided to move to a different state to be closer to their children and grandchildren. You've had a long hard week, and you were looking forward to relaxing on the weekend. But you just found out Bob and Kathy need help packing.

Ending A. You say to your wife, "I suppose we should go help Bob and Kathy, even though I don't want to. If we go help them, maybe God will show a little favor toward us and give us a good crop this year." *How is ending A not consistent with the Augsburg Confession?*

Ending B. You say to your wife, "Look at our list of good works, honey. How many have we done so far this week? I guess we need a few more. Let's go help Bob and Kathy." *How is ending B not consistent with the Augsburg Confession?*

Ending C. You look at your wife and say, "Let's go help the Johnsons. How about we pick up a pizza on our way and take it over there? What kind of pizza would they like?" *How is ending C consistent with the Augsburg Confession?*

Lastly

For next week, what is the Church? Is it a building, a people, or a kingdom?

References

Lutheran Doctrine and Practice Today, A Study Based on Scripture and the Augsburg Confession, Rev. Dr. James A Baneck, North Dakota District President. 2015. CPH.

The Augsburg Confession, <https://www.lutheranchurchcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Augsburg-Confession-Study-Guide.pdf>

Book of Concord Online, The Original Home of the Book of Concord, <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/>

Article XX. Of Good Works.

1 Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding Good Works. 2 For their published writings on the Ten Commandments, and others of like import, bear witness that they have taught to good purpose concerning all estates and duties of life, as to what estates of life and what works in every calling be pleasing to God. 3 Concerning these things preachers heretofore taught but little, and urged only childish and needless works, as particular holy-days, particular fasts, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, services in honor of saints, the use of rosaries, monasticism, and such like. 4 Since our adversaries have been admonished of these things, they are now unlearning them, and do not preach these unprofitable works as heretofore. 5 Besides, they begin to mention faith, of which there was heretofore marvelous silence. 6 They teach that we are justified not by works only, but they conjoin faith and works, and say that we are justified by faith and works. 7 This doctrine is more tolerable than the former one, and can afford more consolation than their old doctrine.

8 Forasmuch, therefore, as the doctrine concerning faith, which ought to be the chief one in the Church, has lain so long unknown, as all must needs grant that there was the deepest silence in their sermons concerning the righteousness of faith, while only the doctrine of works was treated in the churches, our teachers have instructed the churches concerning faith as follows:—

9 First, that our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins, grace, and justification, but that we obtain this only by faith when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been set forth the Mediator and Propitiation, 1 Tim. 2:5, in order that the Father may be reconciled through Him. 10 Whoever, therefore, trusts that by works he merits grace, despises the merit and grace of Christ, and seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength, although Christ has said of Himself: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. John 14:6.

11 This doctrine concerning faith is everywhere treated by Paul, Eph. 2:8: By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of your selves; it is the gift of God, not of works, etc.

12 And lest any one should craftily say that a new interpretation of Paul has been devised by us, this entire matter is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers. For 13 Augustine, in many volumes, defends grace and the righteousness of faith, over against the merits of works. 14 And Ambrose, in his *De Vocatione Gentium*, and elsewhere, teaches to like effect. For in his *De Vocatione Gentium* he says as follows: Redemption by the blood of Christ would become of little value, neither would the preeminence of man's works be superseded by the mercy of God, if justification, which is wrought through grace, were due to the merits going before, so as to be, not the free gift of a donor, but the reward due to the laborer.

15 But, although this doctrine is despised by the inexperienced, nevertheless God-fearing and anxious consciences find by experience that it brings the greatest consolation, because consciences cannot be set at rest through any works, but only by

faith, when they take the sure ground that for Christ's sake they have a reconciled God. As Paul teaches Rom. 5:1: 16Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. 17 This whole doctrine is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience, neither can it be understood apart from that conflict. Therefore 18 inexperienced and profane men judge ill concerning this matter, who dream that Christian righteousness is nothing but civil and philosophical righteousness.


19 Heretofore consciences were plagued with the doctrine of works, they did not hear the consolation from the Gospel. 20 Some persons were driven by conscience into the desert, into monasteries hoping there to merit grace by a monastic life. 21 Some also devised other works whereby to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins. 22 Hence there was very great need to treat of, and renew, this doctrine of faith in Christ, to the end that anxious consciences should not be without consolation but that they might know that grace and forgiveness of sins and justification are apprehended by faith in Christ.

23 Men are also admonished that here the term "faith" does not signify merely the knowledge of the history, such as is in the ungodly and in the devil, but signifies a faith which believes, not merely the history, but also the effect of the history—namely, this article: the forgiveness of sins, to wit, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ.

24 Now he that knows that he has a Father gracious to him through Christ, truly knows God; he knows also that God cares for him, and calls upon God; in a word, he is not 25 without God, as the heathen. For devils and the ungodly are not able to believe this article: the forgiveness of sins. Hence, they hate God as an enemy, call not upon Him, 26 and expect no good from Him. Augustine also admonishes his readers concerning the word "faith," and teaches that the term "faith" is accepted in the Scriptures not for knowledge such as is in the ungodly but for confidence which consoles and encourages the terrified mind.

27 Furthermore, it is taught on our part that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should trust to merit grace by them, but because it is the will of God. 28 It is only by faith that forgiveness of sins is apprehended, and that, for nothing. 29 And because through faith the Holy Ghost is received, hearts are renewed and endowed with new affections, so as to be able to bring forth good works. 30 For Ambrose says: Faith is the mother of a good will and right doing. 31 For man's powers without the Holy Ghost are full of ungodly affections, and are too weak to do works which are good in God's sight. 32 Besides, they are in the power of the devil who impels men to divers sins, 33 to ungodly opinions, to open crimes. This we may see in the philosophers, who, although they endeavored to live an honest life could not succeed, 34 but were defiled with many open crimes. Such is the feebleness of man when he is without faith and without the Holy Ghost, and governs himself only by human strength.

35 Hence it may be readily seen that this doctrine is not to be charged with prohibiting good works, but rather the more to be commended, because it shows how we are

enabled to do good works. 36 For without faith human nature can in no wise do the works of the First or of the Second Commandment. 37 Without faith it does not call upon God, nor expect anything from God, nor bear the cross, but seeks, and trusts in, man's help.  And thus, when there is no faith and trust in God all manner of lusts and human devices rule in the heart. 39 Wherefore Christ said, John 15:5: Without Me ye can do nothing; 40 and the Church sings:

Lacking Thy divine favor,

There is nothing found in man,

Naught in him is harmless. (Source: <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/of-good-works/>)