

V. GOOD WORKS AND PRAYER

1. We believe that faith in Jesus Christ always leads a believer to produce works that are pleasing to God. "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17). As a branch in Christ the vine, a Christian produces good fruit (John 15:5).

2. We believe that works pleasing to God are works of love, for "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). Faith, however, does not set up its own standards to determine what is loving (Matthew 15:9). True faith delights to do only what agrees with God's holy will. That will of God is revealed in the Bible, particularly in the Ten Commandments as their content is repeated in the New Testament. In wrestling with current moral problems, the Christian will therefore seek answers from God's law.

3. We believe, for example, that the Fifth Commandment teaches that all human life is a gift from God. This commandment speaks against abortion, suicide, and euthanasia ("mercy killing").

4. We believe that the Sixth Commandment regulates marriage and the family. God instituted marriage as a lifelong union of one man and one woman (Matthew 19:4-6). It is the only proper context for sexual intimacy and the procreation of children. A marriage can be ended without sin only when God ends the marriage through the death of one of the spouses. Nevertheless, a Christian may obtain a divorce if his or her spouse has broken the marriage through adultery (Matthew 19:9) or malicious desertion (1 Corinthians 7:15). The Sixth Commandment forbids all sexual intimacy apart from marriage, including homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).

5. We believe that individuals are free to make their own decisions concerning matters that are neither forbidden nor commanded by God's Word (adiaphora). People must be careful, however, that their use of this freedom does not cause others to sin.

6. We believe that good works, which are fruits of faith, must be distinguished from works of civic righteousness performed by unbelievers. Although unbelievers may do much that appears to be good and upright, these works are not good in God's sight, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). While we recognize the value of such works for human society, we know that unbelievers cannot do their duty to God through works of civic righteousness.

7. We believe that in this world even the best works of Christians are tainted with sin. A sinful nature still afflicts every Christian. Therefore Christians often fail to do the good they want to do but keep on doing the evil they do not want to do (Romans 7:18-21). They must confess that all their righteous acts are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Because of Christ's redemption, however, these imperfect efforts of Christians are considered holy and acceptable by their heavenly Father.

8. We believe that the Holy Spirit enables every believer to produce good works as fruits of faith (Galatians 5:22-25). The Holy Spirit gives every believer a new nature, or "new man," that cooperates with the Holy Spirit in doing good works. The Holy Spirit uses the gospel to motivate believers to do good works.

9. The Holy Spirit also equips the church with all the spiritual gifts it needs for its well-being (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). During the beginning of the New Testament era, special charismatic gifts were given to the church, such as signs, miracles, and speaking in tongues. These gifts were connected with the ministry of the apostles (2 Corinthians 12:12). There is no evidence in Scripture that we today should expect the continuation of such charismatic gifts.

10. We believe that a life of prayer is a fruit of faith. Confidently, through faith in their Savior, Christians address their heavenly Father with petitions and praise. They present their needs and

the needs of others, and they give thanks (1 Timothy 2:1). Such prayers are a delight to God, and he grants their requests according to his wisdom (Matthew 7:7,8; 1 John 5:14).

11. We reject every thought that the good works of Christians in any way earn or contribute toward establishing a right relationship with God and gaining salvation in heaven.

12. We reject every attempt to abolish the unchanging moral law of God as revealed in the Bible as the absolute standard of what is right and wrong.

13. We reject the view that people may decide for themselves what is right and wrong apart from God's Word. We reject any misuse of the term love to condone behavior contrary to God's Word. We recognize these arguments as schemes of Satan to obscure the knowledge of God's holy will and to undermine the consciousness of sin.

14. We reject any view that considers the act of praying a means of grace. Although God certainly gives good gifts to believers in answer to their prayers, he conveys his forgiving grace and strengthens faith only through the Word and sacraments. Furthermore, we reject any view that looks upon prayer as beneficial only because it helps the one who prays feel better.

15. We reject the view that all prayers are acceptable to God, and we hold that the prayers of all who do not have faith in Christ are vain babbling addressed to false gods (Matthew 6:7).

This is what Scripture teaches about good works and prayer. This we believe, teach, and confess.