

Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude

Lesson 4: Gratitude

Introduction

The final section of the HC, dealing with gratitude, or the appropriate believing response to God's grace, occupies Qu. 86 to 129 (Lord's Day 32 to 52).

Its structure fall into three basic parts:

HC 86-91: the theological basis for good works

HC 92-115: an exposition of the Decalogue

HC 116-129: an exposition of the Lord's Prayer

Along with the exposition of the Apostles' Creed, these three are basic elements of Christian Q and A catechisms from the Middle Ages.

The Theological Basis for Good Works

HC 86 is a brilliant statement of how the objective work of Christ and the Christian's good works fit together within Reformed theology:

Qu. 86: We have been delivered from our misery by God's grace alone through Christ and not because we have earned in: why then must we still do good works?
A: To be sure, Christ has redeemed us by his blood. But we do good because Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us, and so that he may be praised through us. And we do good so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and so that by our godly living our neighbours may be won over to Christ.

There are four aspects to good works mentioned here:

1. They flow from our renewal through the Holy Spirit.
2. They are the way in which we demonstrate our gratitude to God.
3. They have a function in assurance.
4. They serve an evangelistic function.

HC 87 makes it clear that nobody who does not do good works can be saved.

HC 88-91 outlines the nature of the Christian life. It is interesting in this context that repentance and conversion (HC 88: the dying-away of the old self and the coming-to-life of the new) are seen as lifelong actions, and not once-for-all crisis events at the start of the Christian life.

Good works are rooted in God's revelation and the human grasp of that by faith:

Qu. 91: What do we do that is good?

A: Only that which arises out of true faith, conforms to God's law, and is done for his glory; and not that which is based on what we think is right or on established human tradition.

It is closely connected to HC 95:

Qu. 95: What is idolatry?

A: Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed himself in his Word.

The Decalogue

HC 95 is the summary application of the First Commandment. All Ten Commandments are listed in HC 92.

The Decalogue is divided into two tables, (HC 93): 1 to 4 dealing with our relationship to God; 5 to 10 dealing with our obligation to our neighbours.

Each of the other commandments (2 to 10) is introduced by asking what God's will or requirement for us in the specific commandment is, and then, where necessary, asking further questions about specific application.

There are a number of points of interest:

On the second commandment, the HC forbids any portrayal of God and any worship of the image of a creature (HC 97) and makes it clear that images cannot be used as helps to the unlearned (HC 98).

On the fourth commandment, the HC is considerably more vague (relaxed?) than the Westminster Standards. Compare HC 103 and LC 117 and 119:

Qu. 103: What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?

A: First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I regularly attend the assembly of God's people to learn what God's Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that every

day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin already in this life the eternal Sabbath.

LC 117: How is the Sabbath or the Lord's Day to be sanctified?

A: The Sabbath or Lord's Day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be more free and fit for the duties of that day.

LC 119: What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A: The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.

The HC is very moderate and unspecific on the Lord's Day compared to the rigor and detail of the LC.

Sabbatarianism was more of an issue in Britain the seventeenth century for a variety of political and social reasons. This may well account for the difference.

Prayer

The Westminster Standards list prayer as a means of grace, along with the word and the sacraments, SC 88. this would seem to make prayer part of 'grace' rather than 'gratitude'

The HC places prayer in the section on gratitude; it is, after all, a response to God's grace; but even in the HC, the receptive part of prayer is present, as in HC 116:

Qu: Why do Christians need to pray?

A: Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us. And also because God gives his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking him for them.

HC 117 emphasizes that acceptable prayer arises from the heart, is addressed to the true God as revealed, is in accord with God's Word, acknowledges human misery and need, and rests upon God's objective work of grace.

HC 119 is the Lord's Prayer, which is the great template of all acceptable prayer.

The final question is one of the most beautiful:

Qu. 129: What does this little word 'Amen' express?

A: This is sure to be! It is even more sure that God listens to my prayer than that I really desire what I pray for.