

# Is There a Right Way to Live?

Matthew 5:13-20

## Introduction

Going through colloquy, I had to learn how to preach in the Lutheran church. This seemed strange at first, since I had been preaching for 20 years. But there is a difference. There are three styles of sermons in other Protestant churches. **Evangelistic** sermons, the kind *Billy Graham* preached, are aimed at an audience of unbelievers, such as in rallies or crusades. Some pastors, like *Charles Stanley* and *Dr. David Jeremiah*, focus on **educational** sermons, explaining things in **Scripture** and how they affect life today. Last, there are **exhortation** sermons, that aim at encouraging people to live a certain way. The Lutheran sermon is to be based on **Law and Gospel**—explaining how bad we are and showing that we are forgiven freely. The emphasis is on the **Gospel**. That doesn't mean other Protestant sermons don't focus on the **cross**. I was taught early on that every sermon must include the **CHRIST-EVENT**. If it doesn't, you might as well tell them to *be kind to animals*. The typical **Law and Gospel** sermon sometimes leaves this question unanswered: "Now what?" If we talk about how we should live, that's law and we fear people could get that confused with Gospel and lose sight of how we're saved. So, I want to address that question, today: "Now what? **Is there a right way to live?**" To make sure I present a good Lutheran answer, I've relied heavily on the **Formula of Concord**.

## The Early Controversy

Early in the Lutheran church, there arose a controversy over good works. On one side was the claim: *Good works are necessary for salvation*. On the other side: *Good works are harmful to salvation*. This began with a controversy over the words "**necessary**" and "**free**." In the light of **Law and Gospel**, where do you put the emphasis?

## The Church's Answer

The framers of the **Formula of Concord** came up with this solution:

### Good Works Are Necessary

It **is** important how we live. In fact, it's right and proper to say that good works are **necessary** to the Christian life. Good works are **expected**. God made us to do good works (**Ephesians 2:10**). And Jesus says, (read **Matthew 7:15-20**). Good works are the **fruit** of salvation.

### But Not for Salvation

Good works are the **fruit** and not the **root** of salvation. We are saved by **grace** through **faith** (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). It's the **Spirit** who, living within us, motivates us to do good works (**Romans 8:5, 14**). In fact, only Christians can do good works, pleasing to God. If someone does something good for others and is not motivated by the **Holy Spirit**, nor done in **faith**, it's not a good work, in the biblical sense. Anything done to "score points" with God is not a good work, no matter who or how many it benefits.

### They Are Done Freely—Not Coerced

We don't do good works because we think we **should** or because we're **told** to. Out of a **free spirit**, we do good works because of **love** (**1 John 2:5-9**). And we shouldn't be ashamed of our good

works. As Jesus says in our text today, *“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)*. Our good works are done to give **glory to God**. They are our witness to Jesus Christ and His effect on our lives.

### We’re Not Perfect—Just Forgiven

But, what about when we fail? After all, we’re not perfect. Sometimes, we blow it. The good news is, Jesus doesn’t hold that against us, either (**Romans 8:1-2**). Just like the sins we commit, when we fail to do good works as the opportunity arises, we don’t “lose points” with God, either. Grace covers it **all**.

### Means of Grace

This is where the **Means of Grace** come in. As we dwell in Christ, through **Word and Sacrament**, He forgives and empowers us. **Is there a right way to live?** Yes. Live in **faith**, following the lead of the **Spirit** to live for Jesus and bring **glory to Him**. But don’t be dismayed when you fail, for God doesn’t hold that against you. For Christ’s sake, He forgives you and restores you.

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*May the peace of God,  
Which passes all understanding,  
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

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