

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.

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