

B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

The Augsburg Confession: Article 20 Of Good Works

By Pastor Nathanael Mayhew

Good Works

This article, though placed near the conclusion of the first section of the Augsburg Confession, follows naturally after the study of [Article 6 - Of New Obedience](#). The foundation laid in that article is necessary for a proper understanding of the role and purpose of good works. As we study this article, keep in mind our brief summary of Article 6: New obedience is the work of God in the child of God. It flows from God's act of declaring us "not guilty" through faith in Christ, and it can in no way merit forgiveness or anything from God.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 20 is the longest article in the first part of the Augsburg Confession. We can readily divide it into several smaller sections in order to help us better understand its purpose.

- The article begins with a defense of the Lutheran theologians who, it was said, forbid people to do good works. The confessors

point out that they do not forbid good works, they encouraged them. But their emphasis was on true good works, rather than useless works that were self-righteous in nature (1-7).

- They continue with a brief summary of what the Lutheran churches teach concerning good works: "*We begin by teaching that our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace for us, for this happens only through faith, that is, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who alone is the mediator who reconciles the Father. Whoever imagines that he can accomplish this by works, or that he can merit grace, despises Christ and seeks his own way to God, contrary to the Gospel.*" They follow this summary with the Scriptural support for their teaching on good works (8-11).

- The next section refers to the teaching of Augustine to demonstrate from church history that their teaching about good works is not a new teaching (12-13).

- They continue to discuss the peace and comfort that sinners can find only through the

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message of forgiveness, and never through works: *“The conscience cannot come to rest and peace through works, but only through faith, that is when it is assured and knows that for Christ’s sake it has a gracious God, as Paul says in Romans 5:1, ‘Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God.’”* Peace can only come through faith in Christ’s work for us (15-22).

- In order to clarify what is meant by faith, they present the Scripture’s own definition of faith, and clarify that saving faith is different from the “knowledge” of Christ which both the devil and unbelievers may possess. *“The Scriptures speak about faith but do not mean by it such knowledge as the devil and ungodly men possess. Heb. 11:1 teaches about faith in such a way as to make it clear that faith is not merely a knowledge of historical events but is a confidence in God and in the fulfillment of His promises”* (23-26).

- In conclusion, the article reiterates that good works are important and will be prevalent in the lives of God’s children, not meriting God’s grace, but as a fruit of faith in Christ’s work. *“It is also taught among us that good works should and must be done, not that we are to rely on them to earn grace but that we may do God’s will and glorify Him. It is always faith alone that apprehends grace and forgiveness of sin. When through faith the Holy Spirit is given, the heart is moved to do good works. Before that, when it is without the Holy Spirit, the heart is too weak.”* Once again the Scriptural support is offered: *“Such great and genuine works cannot be done without the help of Christ, as He Himself says in John 15:5, ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’”* (27-39).

Contradictions or Various Interpretations?

As we study certain teachings of Scripture it may seem that many passages can be found which are contradictory. For example: The Jehovah’s Witnesses will quote Scripture passages that speak of this earth remaining for eternity while we point to passages that say that this earth will be destroyed by fire. Millennialists refer to passages which speak of a one thousand year reign of Christ on earth, but we bring up passages that say Christ’s kingdom is not of this world. This “dilemma” has been the cause of some disturbing results. Some have concluded that everyone’s truth is different saying “You have your understanding and I have mine.” Others have decided that the Scripture is full of contradictions and errors, and is not different than any other human writing.

Beware of such conclusions! Thoughts like these undermine the only source of truth in this world: The Word of God. This Word has been given **“by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16)** and is **“perfect” “sure” “right” “pure” “clean” “true and righteous”** and **“more to be desired than gold” (Psalm 19)**. As such, we realize and confess that Scripture does not contain errors or contradictions. Nor are we to allow individual interpretations of Scripture since Peter says: **“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21)**.

Scripture on Good Works

The Lutherans taught: *“our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace for*

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us." Scripture says that we are **"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24)**. Jesus told His disciples: **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24)**. Paul writes: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9)**.

The Roman Catholics taught that *good works do merit the remission of sins*. Scripture also says that God will **"render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil" (Romans 2:6-9)**. Jesus says: **"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (Matthew 16:27)**. The apostle John writes: **"And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (Revelation 20:12)**.

Note: Scripture often commands Christians to do good works (Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 8:4; Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:16; and Titus 2:14 are a few examples).

So are we saved by faith in Christ or by our works? The forgiveness of our sins must come one of these two ways, but it cannot be both - Paul says that these two are mutually exclusive (Romans

11:6). Can these two thoughts be reconciled with one another?

Faith and Works

As we search the Scriptures for passages which speak of faith and works, we will find many that refer to both. These passages of Scripture are looking at our justification from two different points of view - from God's point of view and from man's point of view. The LORD told Samuel: **"man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7)**. God looks at the heart of human beings - knowing whether true faith is present on the inside, and He justifies us through that faith.

On the other hand we cannot see the heart, but **"will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16)**. Those passages which speak of us being judged according to our works can be properly understood since works will be present where faith is. Both faith and works are the work of God as Paul says: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10)**.

Note: This study was prepared for the Bible Class at Zion Lutheran Church, Lawrenceville, GA by Pastor Nathanael Mayhew.

What is the religion of love? Part 2

By David Koenig

From the Field May 31, '16

God's Love in the Qur'an (Koran)

(Taken from KITAB No.25-Feb. 2001)

Two things are essential when Christians think about the relationship of the gospel to Islam. One is a thorough knowledge of the gospel. The other is a fair and accurate understanding of the teaching of Islam.

The New Testament places the unconditional love of God at the heart of the good news about Jesus. Does an examination of the Qur'an reveal a similar teaching? This short article sets out one aspect of this question: the use of two verbs for 'love' in relation to Allah.

The two Arabic verbs are habba and wadda. Habba means 'to love, like; to wish, want, or like to do something'. This verb appears in its active form some 40 times with Allah as subject and with a variety of human objects.

We read that Allah loves (habba) the 'good-doers' (2:195; 3:134, 148; 5:93), the 'just' (5:42; 49:9; 60:8), and the 'god-fearing' (9:4,7). Allah does not love the 'evildoers' (3:57, 140; 42: 40), the 'proud and boastful' (4:36; 31:18; 57:23), and the 'workers of corruption' (5:64; 28:77). Two striking occurrences of habba are that Allah does not love the 'prodigal' (musrifun, 6:141; 7:31), and that Allah 'loves those who fight in his way' (61:4). In all there are 22 statements about those whom Allah does not love, and 18 about those whom Allah loves.

A noun from this verb, mahabba, occurs once in relation to Allah: "I endued thee (Moses) with love from me' (20:39).

The second verb for love in the Qur'an is wadda (to love, like, be fond; to want, wish). Forms of

this verb appear in relation to Allah in just three verses. On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will assign love (wudd) to 'those who believe and do deeds of righteousness' (19:96). The prophet Shuaib (sometimes understood to be Moses' father-in law, Jethro) is portrayed as describing his Lord as 'loving' (wadd) in 11:90; and the same term is used to describe Allah's character in 85:14. In these two verses wadd is associated with forgiveness and mercy. Vivienne Stacey gives the meaning of wadd here as 'the affection with which the master responds to the loyalty of a faithful servant'.

One scholar who studied these two verbs in the context of the overall theology of the Qur'an was Muhammad Daud Rahbar. As he wrote his PhD dissertation later published as God of Justice—he concluded that in the Qur'an, Allah loves only people who are perfectly pious'. Since it would be presumptuous for any human to claim perfect piety, Rahbar reasoned, the question as to whether Allah actually loves any human is left open. He found an echo of this ambivalence in the fact that human love for Allah is mentioned only rarely in the Qur'an.

Rahbar was led by a series of deep theological reflections to find the demonstration of divine love in human history in 'a man who loved, who lived humbly like the poorest, who was perfectly innocent and sinless, who was tortured and humiliated in literally the worst manner, and who declared his continued transparent love for those who had inflicted the worst of injuries on him',

The Apostle Paul wanted the daily lives of people to be illuminated by the full extent of

God's love (Eph. 3:18,19). He and other New Testament writers found the objects of divine love to include the powerless, the ungodly, sinful humans, God's enemies, the spiritually dead, and people deserving punishment (Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:3-5). They identified the supreme demonstration of divine love with an event in history: God's sending His Beloved into the world. At this time God dealt decisively with human sin through Jesus' voluntary act of laying down his life for humanity (Jn 3:16, 10:11-18, 15:13; Rom. 5:8, 8:32; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:1-2; I John 3:16, 4:8-10). The good news message, and our motivation for mission, are based firmly on that love of God (2 Cor. 5:14).

When considering the Islamic concept of God in a classic study nearly a century ago, Samuel Zwemer noted that the Qur'an contains only a few expressions of human love for Allah (four verses using forms of habba, none of which is a command). He couldn't help remarking on the contrast between this and 'the abundant and plain teaching of the Old and New Testament regarding the love which God requires of man and which flows out from God to man'.

But the proof must surely come in the reading; and a reading of the verses about habba and wadda makes it clear that there is no Qur'anic concept of the unconditional love of God. So haven't we got something wonderful to share?

In the book "The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam"

From Jihad to Dhimmitude" by Bat Ye'or – The two regions of the world the true Muslim considers are the 'dar al-Islam' or domain of Islam or submission to Allah or the 'dar al-harb' the domain of war where the Muslim will try to bring in all others to submission. This view of the world by the Muslim should be understood by us.

Does Muslim theology teach that we all worship the same God?

(Taken from 'The Voice of the Martyrs' May 2002)

(Note: "Sura" means a chapter in the Koran.)

In the great public relations campaign among religions in America, some leaders tell us that we all worship the same God. Christians may be fooled, but Muslims are not. They do not believe that both of our paths reach the same God. It is important to know the meaning of two Arabic words frequently used in the Koran. The first one is "Kaffara," which is the root verb of the word "Koffar" (i.e., the infidels or those "who do not believe in Islam"), although the Arabic text uses the word "Kuffar," and the translator mentions it as "unbelievers." This is a misleading translation. The translator does not want Westerners to understand that the Koran describes them as infidels, simply because they are not Muslims.

The second word is "Mushrekeen," meaning those who do not worship Allah or those who worship more than one god. This includes Christians and pagans. The Koran is written in Arabic. The English translation for Westerners has been diluted, changing many of the Koran's meanings to fit with the Western mentality. The Koran uses these words listed above to describe Christians and non-Christians, anyone other than Muslims.

Islam teaches the following:

1. "The religion before God is Islam" (Sura 3:19).
2. The infidels and rejecters of faith are those who do not obey God (Allah) and his messenger Mohammed. "Say: obey God and His Apostle 'Mohammed'; but if they turn back, God loveth not those ('Koffar') who reject Faith" (Sura 3:32) meaning Christians do not obey Allah or his messenger Mohammed.
3. The believers (only those who are Muslims, because the only religion before God is Islam, as stated in point 1) cannot have unbelievers (Christians and Jews) as friends or helpers. "Let not the believers take for friends or helpers ('Koffar') unbelievers rather than believers; if any do that, in nothing will there be

help from Allah..." (Sura 3:28). Other translations state that unbelievers (non-Muslims) do not belong to God.

4. Allah ordered Mohammed and his followers to fight with the ("Koffar") unbelievers of Islam. "Fight those ('Koffar') who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day...nor acknowledge the religion of truth (Islam), (even if they are) of the people of the book (Christians and Jews)..." (Sura 9:29).

5. The non-Muslims are non-clean. They are not allowed to come near Mecca and the Sacred Mosque: "O ye who believe! Truly the Pagans 'Mushrekeen' (non-Muslims) are unclean; so let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque..." (Sura 9:28). Today no Christian can visit Mecca. Saudi Arabia made a highway detour around Mecca for Christians if they have to pass by Mecca to go to other destinations. Osama Bin Laden started his war against America, because unbelievers (Christians) went to Saudi Arabia, thus defiling the holy land of the prophet Mohammed.

6. The Koran stated very clearly that "Koffar" are those who say that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and those who believe in the Trinity. In Sura 5:72, we read: "They do blaspheme ('Kaffara') who say: 'Allah is Christ the son of Mary'...Whoever joins other gods with Allah—Allah will forbid him the garden, and the fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong doers be no one to help."

7. We read also in Sura 5:73 'They do blaspheme ('Kaffara') who say: Allah is one of three in the Trinity: for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers 'Koffar' among them."

The Koran regards Christians as people who disbelieve and who worship more than one god ("Kaffara" and "Mushrekeen") although in other suras, Mohammed tried to say nice things about Christians to woo them to his side by calling them the 'people of the book.' He even told them "Our Allah and your Allah is one" (Sura 29:46).

When Mohammed was not able to form his own brand of religion, he rejected the people of the book. When he moved from Mecca to Medina, his attitude changed. This extreme contradiction presents a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde-type contrast in these two sections of the Koran.

As unbelievers, Christians were targets by Mohammed and his followers. That is why in Sura 8:39, Mohammed asked his followers to kill and attack them wherever they find them.

In the end Mohammed himself rode in more than 20 campaigns to kill non-Muslims, as Islam conquered by the sword and by the physical enslavement of non-Muslims throughout North Africa and much of Europe.

Contrast how our God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Ps. 86:15, Ex. 34:6, Ps. 103:8, 145:8, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Neh. 9:17. Notice how this phraseology is repeated in these passages in the Old Testament.

It does not take much to spark Muslims to riot.

In September of 2012 in the cosmopolitan city of Chennai where we lived Muslims from all around the city converged on the American consulate in a protest that was uncontrolled by the police. What sparked this was the events of Benghazi, where four Americans were killed by a planned attack. An anti-Muslim video was thought by some to have caused this Benghazi riot, which was not true. And in Chennai for the Muslims to have converged on the consulate as they did shows that it does not take much to set the anger of Muslims off. The Chennai police commissioner was blamed for not controlling the situation and sacked.