

The Doctrine of Vocation – Lesson 3

Spiritual Living in an Unspiritual World



Thus a Christian man who lives in this confidence toward God knows all things, can do all things, ventures everything that needs to be done, and does everything gladly and willingly, not that he may gather merits and good works, but because it is a pleasure for him to please God in doing these things. He simply serves God with no thought of reward, content that his service pleases God. On the other hand, he who is not at one with God, or is in a state of doubt, worries and starts looking about for ways and means to do enough and to influence God with his many good works. He runs off to St. James, to Rome, to Jerusalem, hither and thither; he prays St. Bridget's prayer, this prayer and that prayer; he fasts on this day and that day; he makes confession here and makes confession there; he questions this man and that man, and yet finds no peace. He does all this with great effort and with a doubting and unwilling heart, so that the Scriptures rightly call such works . . . labor and sorrow. And even then they are not good works and are in vain. Martin Luther, AE 44:27

How are Christians different from everyone else? Our world, and even some Christian denominations, see Christianity basically as a religion of morality. In other words, some Christians strive to live under the Law of God, seeking to earn His favor. This is impossible. On the other hand, some Christians think that good works are not at all necessary in the Christian life. This is a mistake as well.

23. Can we really recognize genuine Christians, based on works alone, within our community? Do good works alone make someone a Christian?

In the World, But Not of the World

24. Read John 17:11–26. In His High Priestly Prayer, what does Jesus say about a Christian's relationship to the world? If the world is so bad, why doesn't Jesus pray for His disciples to be taken out of it?

25. How does Jesus preserve believers in a world that hates them? What is Christ's desire for all believers?

26. Read Ephesians 2:1–9. Despite this broken relationship between God and humanity due to humanity's sin, what place do believers have in God's heavenly kingdom? How is this possible?

27. Read Romans 12:1–2, 17–21, and Ephesians 2:10. Having been redeemed by God through the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross, what are Christians called to do in this world?

28. Read Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–25. How do Christians relate to earthly authorities? For what purpose do earthly governments serve?

29. Read John 18:33–38 and 19:9–12. How does Jesus distinguish God's kingdom of grace from God's kingdom of earthly government?

Living in Two Kingdoms

For the Christian, a proper distinction between God's earthly governance and His heavenly governance must be maintained. God rules and reigns over both kingdoms, but He does so in different ways. As part of God's creation, we hold citizenship in His earthly kingdom and are subject to God's Law. As God's new creation in Christ, we are subjects under God's Gospel and hold citizenship in His heavenly kingdom as well.

30. How does God deal with you as a part of His creation, according to the standards of His earthly kingdom? How does God deal with you as a new creation in Christ, according to the standards of His heavenly kingdom?
31. What are some examples of how these two kingdoms might be confused, and what is the danger in doing so?

Will This World Ever Change?

Thirty years ago, a famous Coca-Cola jingle suggested that the world could sing in "perfect harmony." This message of peace struck such a chord that the song became a pop hit when it was recorded as a single in 1971. Although well-intentioned, the aspiration to reach "perfect harmony" in this present, fallen world is both unrealistic and a denial of sin. People keep expecting that this world will change, but will it?

32. In the past thirty years, has the world gotten any closer to "perfect harmony"? What about in the past five? Why or why not?
33. Read 2 Corinthians 4:8–18. How is a Christian to react to the ceaseless sinfulness and hostility of the world?

Spiritual Exercises

- Use the service of Morning Prayer (LSB, pp. 235–42) as your morning devotion. Note how this service ascribes praise to God both as our Savior and as the provider of our daily needs.
- Christ serves us in His Word and Sacraments. Review commandments One through Three and their explanations in Luther's Small Catechism, giving thanks to God— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for His precious name and His holy Word.
- Also review the Fourth Commandment and its explanation in Luther's Small
- Catechism. Note that the authority God gives to fathers and mothers also extends to all earthly authorities. Pray that the Holy Spirit would guide you to identify any sin in your life so that you may repent of it, receive forgiveness, and strive to obey all those that God has placed in authority over you.

Point to Remember

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may 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

To prepare for "Vocation in the Christian Home," read Ephesians 5:21–6:4.