

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 16.-Of Good Works.

V. We cannot, by our best Works, merit pardon of sin, or eternall life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come; and, the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom, by them, we can neither profit, nor satisfie for the debt of our former sins¹, but, when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants²; and, because, as they are good, they proceed from his Spirit³; and, as they are wrought by us they are defiled, and mixed with so much weaknesses and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of Gods judgement⁴.

Question 1.—*Can our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hands of God?*

Answer.—No. Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8, 9; Tit. 3:5-7; Job 35:7, 8. Thus the Papists and some Quakers err, maintaining that the good works of regenerate men, do truly and properly merit, and deserve eternal life. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because there is no proportion between our imperfect work and life eternal; between the work and the reward, 2 Cor. 4:17. For our light affliction worketh for us, that is, brings forth, not of any merit, but of mere grace, for Christ's sake, Rom. 8:18; 3:28. 2.) If by our good works, we deserved the pardon of sin, we might have whereof to boast, for if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God, Rom. 4:2, 4, 6. But the Scripture says, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord, 1 Cor. 1:31. 3.) Because no creature, performing the most excellent works, can deserve favor from God, or oblige him to give anything as due. And according to the order of God's justice, he can receive no favor from us, nor any creature confer any benefit on him, Ps. 16:2; Job 22:2, 3. Truly, where there is no favor done, there can be no merit; for merit presupposes a benefit accepted. 4.) Because our works are imperfect, as well as to parts, as to degrees, Gal. 5:17; Isa. 64:7; Deut. 27:26. A perfection of parts is, when we have a part of every grace, and are renewed in some measure in every power and faculty of the whole man, though we are not come to the just and due measure in any of them. A perfection of degrees, consists in the complete measure of our conformity, and our exact correspondence to the law of God, in respect to all whatsoever it require.

Question 2.—*Are we, by our own works, ever able to exceed that which is our duty?*

Answer.—No. The command of Christ is clear, Luke 17:10. When we do all that we are commanded, we are yet unprofitable servants, we are men of sinful estate, Isa. 6:5. Our best works are still works proceeding from a corrupt fountain, works bubbling with our depravity, Isa. 64:6. Our works can never contain anything inherently pleasing to God, for we are not able to offer any pleasure to him on our own, Job 22:2, 3.

¹ Rom. 3:20; 4:2, 4, 6; Eph. 2:8, 9; Tit. 3:5-7; Rom. 8:18; Ps. 16:2; Job 22:2, 3; 35:7, 8.

² Luke 17:10.

³ Gal. 5:22, 23.

⁴ Isa. 64:6; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:15, 18; Ps. 143:2; 130:3.

Question 3.—*What is the source of all the goodness in our good works?*

Answer.—The good works that we do are not ours, but it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do, 1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:22, 23; Phil. 2:13. All that we have to offer is only that which we have first received, 1 Chron. 29:14-16.

Question 4.—*Can our good works endure the severity of the judgment of God?*

Answer.—No. Isa. 64:6; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:15, 18; Ps. 143:2; 130:3. The Scripture confutes this notion for the following reasons: 1.) Because that heavenly blessedness which is given to the saints, is expressly attributed to the mercy and pity of God, Ps. 103:4; Matt. 5:7; Tit. 3:5; Eph. 4:6-8. But this is of mercy not merit. 2.) Because when the apostle proclaims death to be the wages of sin, he does not affirm life eternal to be the reward of good works, but the free and gracious gift of God, which we obtain by Christ, even in our sanctification, Rom. 6:23. 3.) Because God will have us buy, without money or price; that is, to receive all things necessary for spiritual life, for nothing, and eternal life itself, Isa. 55:1-3. 4.) Because Christ should not be a perfect Saviour, if any thing from us were added to the righteousness of his merit, but Christ is a perfect Saviour, Eph. 1:7; 2:7-9; 1 John 1:7; Acts 4:12. 5.) Because our best works have such a mixture of corruption and sin in them, that they deserve his curse and wrath; so far are they from meriting, Isa. 64:6. 6.) If the works of regenerated men did deserve eternal life, then should the whole contrivance of the gospel be subverted, and the same very way of life laid down which was in the covenant of works, as 2 Cor. 5:21. The gospel is so contrived, by the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, that there is a judicial transferring of our sins, as a debt on Christ the cautioner, and a translation of his righteousness and merit to be imputed to us, for our justification, without the least respect to our works. Accordingly, we are directed to “look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,” Jude 21.