

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSIOIN OF
FAITH
XVI. OF GOOD WORKS

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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I. WHAT IS A GOOD WORK?

Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention.

- **Our good intentions do not transform an action not commanded by God into a good work.**

“they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2).

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8).

- **Out of blind zeal, men often make atrocious crimes into supposed good works**

“the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God” (Jn. 16:2).

- “If we want to know or test what is pleasing, what is good or even perfect, then we must study God’s will revealed in the Bible (Rom. 12:2).” (van Dixhoorn).

II. FRUIT & EVIDENCE OF FAITH

These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life.

- **A good work fulfills God's commandments and is born of faith. Good works must also be directed towards the right end, i.e. ultimately the glory of God.**
- **Sinners are justified through faith apart from works. But works are the fruits and evidences of true faith.**

“But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (Ja. 2:18).

“every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. . . . Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Mt. 17:17-19).

II. FRUIT & EVIDENCE OF FAITH

The value of good works:

- **Show our gratitude to God:**

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

- “None can render any proper recompense to God for his inestimable blessings; but all Christians are indispensably bound to glorify him by a universal and cheerful obedience.” (Shaw).

- **Strengthen our assurance:**

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3).

“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election” (2 Pet. 1:10).

- Good works testify to our consciences that our faith is true and real.

II. FRUIT & EVIDENCE OF FAITH

The value of good works:

- **Edify fellow believers:**

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 5:16).

- “If we want to bless one another and stir up more zeal, then we need to engage in practical works such as giving to the needy” (van Dixhoorn).
- “Those who are careful to maintain good works become patterns to others, and stir them up to a holy emulation” (Shaw).

- **Adorn our profession of the gospel / Stop the mouths of scoffers:**

“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people” (1 Pet. 2:15).

“Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled” (1 Tim. 6:1).

II. FRUIT & EVIDENCE OF FAITH

The value of good works:

- **Glorify God**

“Be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 2:10-11).

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (Jn. 15:8).

God’s Workmanship:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Unto Eternal Life:

“Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” (Rom. 6:22).

- “Good works are essentially prerequisite to an admission into heaven. Though they do not merit everlasting life, yet they are indispensably necessary in all who are ‘heirs of the grace of life’” (Shaw).

III. ENABLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ. And that they may be enabled thereunto, beside the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will, and to do, of his good pleasure: yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon a special motion of the Spirit; but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

- **Good works are the fruit of our union with Christ:**
 - “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).
 - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

III. ENABLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

- **By the indwelling Holy Spirit, God enables us to do good works which otherwise we could not:**
 - “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor. 3:5).
 - “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).
- **We cannot, therefore, blame a lack in the Holy Spirit for our lack of good works:**
 - Opposes enthusiasts who refuse to do good works unless specially prompted by the Spirit
 - We are responsible to do good works, for which God supplies his Spirit:
 - “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13).
 - We are to seek God’s grace actively through the ordinary means of grace:
 - “I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6).
 - Those who neglect their Bibles impoverish themselves for good works!
 - The vital role of prayer – for ourselves and for others!

IV – V: THE LIMITS OF GOOD WORKS

They who, in their obedience, attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do.

We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal 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 satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants: and because, as they are good, they proceed from his Spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.

VI. ACCEPTED IN CHRIST

Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unprovable in God's sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).

“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do” (Heb. 6:10).

“Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Mt. 25:37-40).

VII. UNBELIEVING WORKS ARE SINFUL

Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God: and yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God.

“So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean” (Hag. 2:14).

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled” (Tit. 1:15).

“These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mk. 7:6).