

Blueprints for Belief

Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith

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1. 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.

- “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?” – Micah 6:8

2. 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 the 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.

- “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 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.” – James 2:17-18
- “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” – Matthew 5:16

3. 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.

- “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” – Ezekiel 36:27
- “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.” – Philippians 2:12-13

4. 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. (supererogate = RC doctrine of doing more than God requires)

- “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” – 1 John 1:8

5. 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.

- “So, you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” – Luke 17:10
- “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight.” – Romans 3:20

6. 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 unreprovable 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.

- "...to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:5
- "...may [God] equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." Hebrews 13:20-21

7. 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 therefore 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.

- "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." – Isaiah 64:6
- "Without faith it is impossible to please God." – Hebrews 11:6
- "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." – Romans 14:23

Objections

Roman Catholic / Orthodox: "The Bible clearly teaches that God rewards works—therefore good works must contribute to justification and eternal life."

- Reply: Works are evidential, not instrumental. Rewards are gracious, not meritorious.

Antinomian: "If we are justified by faith alone, then good works don't matter."

- "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." – Galatians 5:13

Perfectionist/Holiness Movement: "The confession is too pessimistic. Surely good works can be perfect by the Spirit's enabling."

- Real change and growth is possible in this life, but sin remains.

Discussion Questions

- 1) There are two major errors confronted by this chapter – legalism and license. Where are you tempted to think of good works as either "earning" something from God or as "optional" in the Christian life?
- 2) What "good works" are you doing from habit, guilt, or cultural expectation rather than from faith and the desire for God's glory?
- 3) How does knowing that your good works are always imperfect—but still accepted in Christ—free you from discouragement or pride?