

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 16.-Of Good Works.

VII. 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 others¹: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith²; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word³; nor, to a right end, the glory of God⁴; they are therefore sinfull, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God⁵. And yet, their neglect of them is more sinfull, and displeasing unto God⁶.

Question 1.—*May works done by unregenerate men be, for the matter of them, such things as God commands and of good use both to themselves and others?*

Answer.—Yes. 2 Kings 10:30,31; 1 Kings 21:27,29; Phil. 1:15,16,18. It is true that unregenerate men may perform many actions which, for the matter of them, are such as God commands, and are of good use both to themselves and others. The truth of this is verified in the experience and observation of all men, and we believe it is not called in question by any party.

Question 2.—*Is it necessary for such works to be from a heart purified by faith?*

Answer.—Yes. Gen. 4:5; Heb. 11:4. Although unregenerate men may perform actions as to the matter of them good, they cannot render an action “good and acceptable in the sight of God,” Rom. 8:8. An action may be *materially*, and yet not *formally*, good. Faith alone can render men’s actions acceptable, Heb. 11:6. The ploughing of the wicked is said to be sin, Prov. 21:4. And thus, as long as men stay away from Christ, and refuse to submit to the righteousness of God, all their use of the means of grace and all their natural virtues are sins in God’s sight.

Question 3.—*Must our works be according to the Word in order to please God?*

Answer.—Yes. 1 Cor. 13:3. The manner of works which please God is set forth in the Word, from which we may neither add or take away, Deut. 12:32. Any works done to please God must conform to His holy precepts, Isa. 1:12.

Question 4.—*Is the glory of God the right end toward which all our actions must flow in order to please God?*

Answer.—Yes. Matt. 6:2,5,16. All actions, in order to please God, must be ordered in such a way as to have for their right end the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10:31; Rom. 11:36.

Question 5.—*Are works done by the unregenerate men, although for the matter of them things commanded by God and of good use both to themselves and others, yet still sinful and such as cannot please God?*

¹2 Kings 10:30,31; 1 Kings 21:27,29; Phil. 1:15,16,18.

²Gen. 4:5 with Heb. 11:4; Heb. 11:6.

³1 Cor. 13:3; Isa. 1:12.

⁴Matt. 6:2,5,16.

⁵Hag. 2:14; Tit. 1:15; Amos 5:21,22; Rom. 9:16; Tit. 3:5.

⁶Ps. 14:4; Ps. 36:3; Job 21:14,15; Matt. 25:41,42,43,45; Matt. 23:23.

Answer.—Yes. Hag. 2:14; Tit. 1:15; Amos 5:21,22; Rom. 9:16; Tit. 3:5. So then we see that the Papists err maintaining that not only all the works of unregenerate men are not sinful, but also that some of their works do indeed merit and deserve somewhat from God—the merit of congruity—as they are agreeable to the law of God. Likewise, they say there is a merit of condignity, by which the works of the regenerate, which follow justification, deserve eternal life, not from the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, but from their intrinsic worth, and proportionableness to the reward. These lies are confuted by the following reasons: 1.) Because a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither a corrupt tree good fruit, Matt. 7:18. 2.) Because all unregenerate men are dead in trespasses and sins, Eph. 2:1. 3.) Because all works done by the unregenerate are done without faith, and so cannot please God, Heb. 11:6; Rom. 14:23. 4.) Because if unregenerate men were able to do good works, or perform any duty which deserves something from God, then it would follow that a man is able to do some good of himself, contrary to the Scriptures, John 15:5; Phil. 2:13. 5.) Because it is clear from Scripture, that before renewing grace, all are the children of wrath; who of themselves cannot have a good thought, nor any active concurrence, or putting themselves forth to the utmost, for their own conversion, 2 Cor. 3:5. Therefore there is no plea for merit by any improvement of men’s natural abilities, Rom. 9:15.

Question 6.—*Is the neglect of them more sinful, and displeasing unto God?*

Answer.—Yes. Ps. 14:4; Job 21:14,15; Matt. 25:41,42,43,45. God is more displeased with their neglecting to do these commanded duties at all than he is with their doing them sinfully as sinners, Ps. 36:3. These works done by unregenerate men are commanded by God, and hence are their bounden duties.

Their sin lies not in their doing them, but in their personal attitude of rebellion, and in the absence of the proper motives and objects. If they neglected to do them, the neglect would be added to the other grounds of condemnation, which would remain all the same. These ought they to do, but not to leave the weightier matters of the law undone, Matt. 23:23. The amiable acts of a rebel must involve elements of rebellion, and yet he would be more to be condemned without them than with them.