

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 16.-*Of Good Works.*

I. Good Works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy Word¹, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intention².

Question 1.—*Are any works considered good works if they are not commanded in the Word of God?*

Answer.—No. In order that a work may be good, 1.) It must be an act performed in conformity to God's revealed will, Micah 6:8. The law of absolute moral perfection to which we are held in subjection is not the law of our own reasons or consciences, but it is an all-perfect rule of righteousness, having its ground in the eternal nature of God, and its expression and obliging authority to us in the divine will, 1 Pet. 1:16. Not self-development, not the realization of an ideal end, but obedience to a personal authority without and above us, is precisely what reason, conscience, and Scripture require, 1 John 5:3. The good man is the *obedient* man, Josh. 24:15. The sinner in every transgression of virtue is conscious that he is guilty of disobedience to the Supreme Lawgiver, Gen. 39:9. David says in his repentance, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," Ps. 51:4. God has given in the inspired Scriptures a perfect rule of faith and practice. Every principle, every motive, and every end of right action, according to the will of God, may there be easily learned by the devout inquirer, Ps. 37:23. God says to his Church: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it," Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18, 19. And God very energetically declares his abhorrence of uncommanded services, of "voluntary humility" and "will-worship," Isa. 1:11, 12; Col. 2:16–23.

In order that a work may be truly good, 2.) It must spring from a principle of faith and love in the heart, Rom. 14:23; Gal. 5:6. All men recognize that the moral character of an act always is determined by the moral character of the principle or affection which prompts to it, Matt. 12:35. Unregenerate men perform many actions, good so far as their external relations to their fellow men are concerned, Luke 18:4, 5. But love to God is the foundation-principle upon which all moral duties rest, just as our relation to God is the fundamental relation upon which all our other relations rest, 1 John 4:18-21. If a man is alienated from God, if he is not in the present exercise of trust in him and love for him, any action he can perform will lack the essential element which makes it a true obedience, Ps. 10:4. Good works, according to the Scriptures, are the fruits of sanctification, having their root in regeneration: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," Eph. 2:10. James says that faith is shown by works; which of course implies that the kind of works of which he speaks spring only from a believing heart, Jas. 2:18, 22.

¹ Micah 6:8; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 13:21.

² Matt. 15:9; Isa. 29:13; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rom. 10:2; John 16:2; 1 Sam. 15:21-23.

Question 2.—*Are good works 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, upon any pretence of good intention?*

Answer.—Yes. Rom. 12:2; Heb. 13:21; Isa. 29:13; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rom. 10:2; John 16:2; 1 Sam. 15:21-23. So then, the Papists err, who maintain, that not only such works are good, which are done according to the will and law of God, but others also, which are commanded by the public authority of the church, though over and above what the law of God requires. And that those also are good works, which are done out of a good intention to advance God's glory, or to perform worship to him, though they are not commanded by God.

Likewise, the Libertines err, who maintain, that the difference between good works and evil, depends only upon the private and particular opinion of every man. For they think, that no work ought to be called evil, but in so far, as he that does it, thinks it is evil. They are confuted for the following reasons:

1.) Because good works are described by the apostle to be such, as God before hath ordained, that we should walk in them, Eph. 2:10. 2.) Because God expressly commands, that every man must not do that which seems good in his own eyes, but only such works as he hath commanded, and must neither add thereto, nor diminish from it, Deut. 12:8, 32; Josh. 1:7; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:19. 3.) Because the Lord openly testifies that in vain do they worship him, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, not requiring that will worship, which fantastic men would give him, Isa. 1:13; Matt. 15:9; Micah 6:6-8; Col. 2:23. 4.) Because the scribes and Pharisees are severally rebuked by Christ, that made the commandments of God of no effect, by their tradition, Matt. 15:6. And it is often mentioned in the books of Kings and Chronicles, as a fault in the kings of Judah, that the high-places were not taken away. And how severely were the Israelites punished, for their worshipping of the golden calf, Ex. 32:27, 28, and for worshipping the calves, which Jeroboam set up at Dan and Bethel; all know, 1 Kings 12:28. 5.) Because the law of God is the perfect rule and square of good works, to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is, because there is no light in them, Isa. 8:20. 6.) Because without faith it is impossible to please God, Heb. 11:6. But faith has always a respect to the word of God, Gen. 15:6; Jas. 2:17.