

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 16.1–2 – The Definition and Place of Good Works

“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)

I. The Place of Chapter 16 in the Westminster Confession of Faith

- A. “Faith, Repentance, and New Obedience” – Aaron Messner (ILL: see back of WMPCA bulletin!)
- B. **Matt 3:8** – *“Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.”*

II. The Definition of Good Works

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. (WCF 16.1)

- A. How might the question of what the church ought to do in worship help us here? In worship, how do mere good intentions fall short of pleasing God?
- B. How do we sometimes give good intentions too much weight when evaluating a work? Can you think of a specific time when you did this? What can be the consequences?
- C. How does defining good works according to Scripture prevent disruption within the church?
 - 1. Hence, Roman Catholic “evangelical counsels” (vows of perpetual chastity, voluntary poverty, and perfect obedience) are not intrinsically “good works.”

III. The Place of Good Works in the Christian Life

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. (WCF 16.2)

- A. **James 2:18** – *“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.”*

*“When therefore, we say that the faithful are esteemed just even in their deeds this is not stated as a cause of their salvation, and we must diligently notice that the cause of salvation is excluded from this doctrine; for, when we discuss the cause, we must look nowhere else but to the mercy of God, and there we must stop. But although works tend in no way to the cause of justification, yet, when the elect sons of God were justified freely by faith, at the same time their works are esteemed righteous by the same gratuitous liberality. Thus it still remains true, that faith without works justifies, although this needs prudence and a sound interpretation; for this proposition, **that faith without works justifies is true and yet false**, according to the different senses which it bears. The proposition, **that faith without works justifies by itself, is false**, because faith without works is void. **But if the clause “without works” is joined with the word “justifies,” the proposition will be true. Therefore faith cannot justify when it is without works, because it is dead, and a mere fiction.** He who is born of God is just, as John says. (1 John v. 18.) Thus **faith can be no more separated from works than the sun from his heat: yet faith justifies without works**, because works form no reason for our justification; but faith alone reconciles us to God, and causes him to love us, not in ourselves, but in his only-begotten Son.” – John Calvin on Ezekiel 18:14–17*

- A. WCF 11.2 – *“Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.”*
- B. What are the seven purposes of good works listed in WCF 16.2? On which of the seven do you want to reflect further?
- C. What does it mean that as good works bear “fruit unto holiness,” believers “may have the end, eternal life”? Does this mean good works are necessary to salvation?

“[Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:14)

According to the Bible, good works are a key reason why God saved you!