

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 16.4–5 – The Imperfection 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. Review

A. 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)

B. 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)

1. **Titus 2:14** – “[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.”

C. The Ability to Do Good Works

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. (WCF 16.3)

1. **Phil 2:12–13** – “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

II. The Imperfection of Good Works

A. The error of thinking the best of us can go “beyond the call of duty” ...

They who, in their obedience, attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate [i.e., perform a ‘super work’!], and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do. (WCF 16.4)

1. **Neh 13:22** – “Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.”

2. A.A. Hodge's Five-Fold Critique of "Works of Supererogation"
 - a. If an act is morally good, it is obligatory. "If it is obligatory, it is not supererogatory."
 - b. God rejects as an abomination all works that man has devised that God has not commanded in His Word, yet works by which man imagines can earn him merit.
 - c. "Christ has given no 'counsels,' as distinct from his commands."
 - d. All grace to perform any work is supplied to us has been "secured ... by the purchase of Christ's blood" and is worked in us by the Spirit.
 - e. This Roman Catholic system has produced such bad fruits that the principle on which they rest is "radically immoral and false."

B. The error of thinking our best works can merit salvation ...

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. (WCF 16.5)

1. In what surprising ways does the WCF 16.5 drive home the insufficiency of good works for salvation?
2. How does the non-meritorious character of our best works guard us from bitterness? Pride?
3. Which reason for their non-meritorious character do you want to reflect on further in your life?

"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)