

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 16.7 – The Works of Unbelievers

“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 ... (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 ... (WCF 16.2)

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 ... there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will, and to do, of his good pleasure ... (WCF 16.3)

D. The Imperfection of Good Works

They who, in their obedience, attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life ... fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do. (WCF 16.4)

We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God ... but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants ... (WCF 16.5)

E. The Acceptance of Christian Works

Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him ... [and God] is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections. (WCF 16.6)

1. *“It will be no damp to the happiness of those who have lower degrees of happiness and glory, that there are others advanced in glory above them. For all shall be perfectly happy, every one shall be perfectly satisfied. Every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are some vessels far larger than others.” (Jonathan Edwards, Works, 2:902)*
2. *“Although the mode and degree of that inequality of glory is unknown to us, nor should it be rashly defined by anyone, the thing itself is not on that account to be denied. This can be shown by various arguments from other sources. It is sufficient to hold that there is a certain disparity, although what and how great it is cannot be told.” (Francis Turretin, Institutes, 20.10.23). [see 1 Cor 3:8, 14–15, 15:41–42; 2 Cor 9:6; Luke 19:11–26]*

II. The “Good” Works of Unbelievers

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. (WCF 16.7)

A. Section 7 affirms that the works of those who are outside of Christ are good, but in what sense?

1. **2 Kings 10:28–30** – “Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. ²⁹ But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin—that is, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan. ³⁰ And the Lord said to Jehu, ‘Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.’”

B. According to Section 7, what are three ways that unregenerate peoples’ works fall short?

1. **Phil 1:9–11** – “And it is my prayer that your love [Motive] may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent [Standard], and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God [Goal].”

C. How should each of these three aspects of a Christian’s “good work” motivate us? How does it convict us?

1. **1 Cor 13:3** – “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

D. Are you willing to rejoice over good works done with less than good motives? When is this difficult for you?

1. **Matt 6:1–2** – “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ² Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites ... Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”

2. **Rom 8:8** – “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

E. How can we encourage and bless our unbelieving neighbors and family members in their commendable works while also pointing them to the glory of God?

“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.” (Heb 6:10)