

## XII. *Of Good Works.*

*ALBEIT that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.*

After donating 30 billion dollars to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Warren Buffet said, "There is more than one way to get to heaven, but this is a great way." The world in which we live would agree with his words. This world constantly measures the worth of every human being by what we do. God created human beings, and in an attempt to redeem ourselves, we've turned into a bunch of "human doings". Even Christians, who have seen the perfect Son of God nailed to a Cross as a testimony of (Ephesians 3:18) "... the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of a love we could never earn; even we battle the desire to merit God's love and the hope of heaven by our own good works.

It is my prayer that the following discussion on Article XII will help us gain biblical perspective on the extent of the value placed on our own good works. We begin by turning our attention to the comments of E.H. Browne. Browne begins his commentary by stating what he believes the objective of Article XII to be, which is, to find that Anglican middle-ground between two extremes. On one side is the error of believing that since we are saved by the unearned grace of God and not by our own good works, we are under no obligation to do good works or obey the laws of ethics or morality, and on the other side is the equally erroneous view that our works merit grace, forgiveness, and even eternal life.

Browne follows this introductory thought with the statement that Article XII teaches three things:

- I. I. Good works follow justification.
- II. II. They spring from God and a lively faith, but they cannot put away sin and endure the severity of God's judgment.
- III. III. In Christ they are pleasing to God, and they are as necessary to a justifying faith as good fruit is to a healthy tree.

Browne begins his thoughts concerning “the good works of justified men” and the argument that they are not perfect enough to put away sin and endure the severity of God’s judgment by quoting the words of our Lord. In the Gospel according to St. Luke (17:10) Jesus said to His disciples, “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” This verse reveals the fact that whatever good and even perfect work we do, we remain “unprofitable servants”, deserving of no special thanks for we have only “done that which was our duty to do”. In other words, our good work is unable to redeem our past failures. It is pleasing to God, yet it does not make us more than what He created us to be – only what we were meant to be.

We however, even as regenerate Christians, cannot claim that we were such “unprofitable servants”, for we have not been perfect in our obedience. We have not always “done that which was our duty to do”. We have (Romans 3:23) “sinned and come short of the glory of God”. The thought of being “unprofitable” is to us, apart from Christ, the impossible dream. Never deserving a reward in the first place, and subsequently making our state far worse by falling into sin, we are left entirely unable to redeem our past. We cannot put away our sin. We need a Savior. The inspired words of St. Paul tell us that our only hope is to be (Romans 3:24) “justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”.

Browne spends the most time and effort on his third point concerning Article XII: “1. That in Christ, good works are pleasing and acceptable to God; and 2, that they do necessarily spring out of a true and lively faith.” The words “in Christ” are the key to discussing the first part of this point. Browne writes, “... whatever is good in us must spring from the grace of Christ, and whatever in us is acceptable to God is acceptable for Christ’s sake”. This statement reaffirms the truth that apart from Christ, we cannot please God. The words of Jesus found in the Gospel of John (15:5) offer further clarity. There Jesus said, “... for without me ye can do nothing.” He didn’t say without Him we would only do a trifle, a trace, or a smidgen; He said without Him we would do NOTHING! As members of His body, we are unable to move without a connection to the Head or clear direction from the Head. For those who have “put on Christ” – Christ as the Head directs us into every good work, Christ as the Vine provides the life and nourishment necessary to

bring forth fruit, and Christ as the Son of the King clothes us in His majesty. Whatever good we do is directed by Christ, accomplished through Christ, and viewed by Almighty God as the righteous work of His Son.

This is the abundant life of good deeds which are “pleasing and acceptable to God” that Christ invites us to enter into with Him. After a barrage of Scripture quotes that all directly say our new creation in Christ Jesus is (Ephesians 2:10) “unto good works...”; Browne states, “Thus we plainly see that good works wrought in Christ are not only useful and desirable, but are absolutely necessary for every Christian, and are pleasing and acceptable to God.” The necessity of these good works is a truth clearly seen in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. In Matthew 25 (31-46), as Christ sits upon “the throne of His glory” separating nations one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats; His terrifying words of judgment don’t focus on sins of commission, but of omission – all the good work we failed to do. The righteous at His right hand are never said to be those who lived sinless lives, but simply those who looked for God in the needs of their neighbor, and loved Him through a sacrificial life of good works that served to meet that need.

Still, even as we listen to Christ welcome those clothed in good works “into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”; we refuse to stand on the merit of such works. The book of Proverbs tells us that in them (11:18) “there shall be a sure reward”, but the reward for this good, necessary, pleasing, and acceptable work is simply another gift freely bestowed by our loving Father. In the words of the prophet Hosea (10:12), we sow to ourselves in righteousness, and “reap in mercy”.

Browne wraps up his thoughts on Article XII by addressing the truth that good works “do spring out necessarily of a true and living faith”. The backbone of his defense of this statement is found in the heroes of our faith and in the inspired words of St. Paul. The explanation of a true and living faith given in the book of Hebrews is “almost entirely” one of example. In fact, the eleventh chapter could be described as a list of holy works that sprung from the energizing power of faith (just like a good tree bringing forth good fruit); and St. Paul speaks of faith, holiness, and the necessity to bring forth good works as a consequence of Christian doctrine. This doctrine is spoken in the General Thanksgiving when we say, “... that we show forth thy

praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service..." Browne concludes, "... we cannot assign too high a place to good works, so long as we do not assign to them the power of meriting salvation."

Now, we conclude our discussion with comments from Thomas Rogers. His comments on Article XII often echo those of Browne, but Rogers goes to a greater extent to use the Article to combat heresy through a more specific list of errors and adversaries. We may feel much of this heresy is well behind us, however, the following errors that Rogers points out are very relevant today.

As he argues the point that "no work is good except it spring from faith", he recognizes the errors of the Valentinians and Papists in his day. I would suggest those in error today are people that entrust their hope of heaven, not ultimately to God, but to themselves in the subjective belief: "I'm a good person." If our work is not rooted in God, if it does not spring from true and lively faith in Him and what He has revealed Himself to be in Scripture; it is not good at all. God alone is the Author of every good work, for "there is none good but one, that is, God." (Matthew 19:17) "But without faith it is impossible to please Him..." (Hebrews 11:6)

Rogers also reveals this error he attributes to the "hypocritical Pharisees" and the "Pharisaical Papists": "Life eternal is due unto good works by the justice of God." Perhaps this is what Warren Buffet was thinking when he said a \$30 billion donation is a "great way" to get to heaven. From a worldly point of view a \$30 billion ransom paid to release him from the wages of sin sounds like justice, but we do not set the standard of perfect justice – God does. Through the "precious death and sacrifice" of His Beloved Son He has provided the One and Only way to stand justified before Him; the One and Only way for Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free, billionaire or pauper. Many believe that justice is served and life eternal is won by doing, but we know that perfect justice was proclaimed on the Cross and that we can never be good enough or work hard enough to find the rest our soul desires.