

An Exposition of the 2nd (1689) London Baptist Confession

Chapter 16.1-7: Of Good Works

16.5 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;^a but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and because they are good they proceed from his Spirit,^b 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 punishment.^c

^a Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 4:6 ^b Gal. 5:22–23 ^c Isa. 64:6; Ps. 43:2

1. We cannot merit pardon of sin or eternal life (Romans 3:20; 4:6; Ephesians 2:8-9).
 - a. Because of the great disproportion that is between our best works and the glory to come.
 - b. Because of the infinite distance that is between us and God.
 - c. Because our best works cannot satisfy the debt for our former sins.
 - d. Because good works are only good because of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
 - e. Because our best works are defiled and mixed with weakness and imperfection (Isaiah 64:6).
 - f. Because our best works cannot endure the severity of God's punishment (Psalm 43:2).
2. When we have done all we can...
 - a. We have only done our duty (Luke 17:10).
 - b. We are unprofitable servants.

16.6 Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him;^a not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unreprovable in God's sight, but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.^b

^a Eph. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:5 ^b Matt. 25:21, 23; Heb. 6:10

1. The good works of believers are accepted.
 - a. The persons of believers are accepted.
 - b. Their good works are accepted in Christ (Ephesians 1:5).
2. God looks upon the believer's sincere good works in His Son (Matthew 25:21, 23; Hebrews 6:10).
 - a. Even though their works are not wholly unblameable and unreprovable.
 - b. Even though their works are accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

16.7 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 to others;^a yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith,^b nor are done in a right manner according to the Word,^c nor to a right end, the glory of God,^d they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, nor make a man meet to receive the grace from God,^e and yet their neglect for them is more sinful and displeasing to God.^f

^a 2 Kings 10:30; 1 Kings 21:27, 29 ^b Gen. 4:5; Heb. 11:4, 6 ^c 1 Cor. 13:1 ^d Matt. 6:2, 5 ^e Amos 5:21–22; Rom. 9:16; Titus 3:5 ^f Job 21:14–15; Matt. 25:41–43

1. The works done by unregenerate men...
 - a. May indeed be things God commands.
 - b. May in reality be of good use both to themselves and to others (1 Kings 21:27-29).
2. Yet these works are sinful and cannot please God.
 - a. Because they do not proceed from a heart purified by faith (Hebrews 11:4, 6).
 - b. Because they are not done in a right manner according to the Word (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).
 - c. Because they are not done to the right ends – to the glory of God (Matthew 6:2, 5).
3. These works cannot make a person able to receive the grace from God (Titus 3:5).
4. Yet to neglect them is to add to the unbeliever's sin and to God's displeasure (Job 21:14-15; Matthew 25:41-43).