Apology — Robert Barclay —195, 199-200, 202-203

the necessity of good works

extract of Proposition VII § ix, x, xi, xii

§ ix Third, we should consider whether good works are necessary to justification. I suppose I have already said enough to clear us from any suspicion of being Popish in this matter.

Question: Have we not said, and will we not affirm, that a person is justified by works?

Answer: I answer that no one should take offense if we answer with the plain language of the Holy Scripture, which gives this clear answer (James 2:24): "You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." I shall not try to prove the truth of this saying, since what the apostle says in this chapter is enough to convince anyone who is willing to read and believe it. I shall only derive one argument:

Argument: If no one can be justified without *faith*, and no faith is *living* or available for justification without works, then *works are necessary for justification.* . . .

§ x. . . . But finally, in order to answer this objection completely and to establish this doctrine of good works, I will cite another saying of the same apostle Paul which our enemies also make use of against us in the blindness of their minds: "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). It is generally agreed that "saved" means the same as saying "justified."[1] There are two kinds of works

[1] Latin: *Omnes autem communiter concedunt, quod, qui salvi facti sunt, itidem justificati sint; ideoque quando dicit "salvos nos fecit" non secus est quam si dixisset, justificatos.* "However everyone agrees universally that those who

mentioned here; one kind, by which we are not saved, that is, not justified; and the other kind, by which we are saved, that is, justified. The first kind is the works of righteousness which we have done, that is we have done them in our first, fallen nature, by our own strength, our own legal performances[2] — and these works are truly and rightly called ours, no matter what specious appearance they may seem to have.[3] And that those works must be understood in this way is clearly shown in the second part of the quotation: "but through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" — regeneration is a work which includes many good works, indeed all the works which are called the "fruits of the Spirit."[4] . . .

§ xi. *Objection*: Thirdly, they object that no works, not even the works of Christ in us, can have a place in justification because nothing that is impure can be useful in justification and all the works done in us are impure.[5] To prove this they quote Isaiah 64:6: "all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags."[6] They add that, since we are impure our works must

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are saved, so also they are justified; and therefore when he says 'he saved us' it is no different than if he said, 'he justified us.' "

[2]Latin: *propriis nostris observationibus*, "our own observances (duties, compliance with the law)."

[3] Latin: q*ualemcunque habeant æquitatis speciem*, "whatever outward appearance they may have of equanimity (conformity, justice, calmness)."

[4] The argument seems to be: there are two kinds of works. One kind is the works which are done in our own will and strength; these works cannot justify us. The second kind is the works which are done as a result of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. These works are a necessary part of our justification, because if we have been transformed by the Spirit these works are the inevitable fruit of that regeneration.

[5] Latin: *omnia autem opera en nobis, imo ea, quae Christus per Spiritum operatur, esse impura*. "and moreover all works done in us, even those which Christ does by the Spirit, are impure."

[6] Latin: *quasi pannus menstruatæ universæ justitiæ nostræ,* "like a menstrual cloth are all our righteous deeds." Here, Barclay's Latin text corresponds exactly with the Vulgate, which is usually not the case.

also be impure; even if our works were good in themselves they become stained with impurity when we do them, just as clean water passing through a dirty pipe is defiled.

Answer: We accept that no impure works are useful to justification, but we deny that all the works done *within* the saints are impure. The distinction we made before will answer this objection: we admit that the first kind of works mentioned above is impure, but not the second, because the first are done in the unrenewed condition, but not the other. And as for the citation from Isaiah, it must be about the first kind, for though he says "all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags," yet that cannot include the righteousness of Christ *within* us but only what we do *of* and *by* ourselves. Because if we interpreted it that way, it would follow that we should throw away all holiness and righteousness since anything like filthy rags or a menstruous[7] garment ought to be thrown away. Indeed, it would follow that all the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5 would be like filthy rags, but on the contrary some of the works of the saints are said to have a "sweet savor in the nostrils of the Lord;" are said to be an "ornament of great price in the sight of God;" are said to "prevail with him," and to be "acceptable to him"[8] — which cannot be said of filthy rags or a menstruous garment. . . .

§xii As to the other part of their argument, that the best people are still impure and imperfect and therefore their works must be the same, that begs the question[9] and depends on a proposition they themselves deny which will be discussed more fully in the eighth Proposition. Even

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[7] See previous footnote.

[8] Barclay indicates that these phrases are direct quotations, but we have not been able to identify them in the Bible.

[9] "Begging the question" is a logical fallacy classified by Aristotle, in which the proposition which is supposed to be proved is already assumed in one of the premises.

though we suppose that a man is not thoroughly perfect in all respects, that still will not prevent works which are good and perfect in their way from being brought forth *in* him by the Spirit of Christ. The example of water going through an unclean pipe falls short, because though water may be able to be tainted with uncleanness, yet the Spirit of God cannot be tainted, and we assert that it is the Spirit who is the immediate author of those works which are necessary for justification.[10] Therefore the works of Jesus Christ in his children are pure and perfect, and he works in and through that pure thing which he himself formed and created *in* them. Moreover, if what our enemies suppose were true, that no man ever was or can be perfect, it would follow that the very miracles and works of the apostles, which Christ did in them and which they did in and by the Power, Spirit and Grace of Christ, were also impure and imperfect, such as their conversion of the nations to the Christian faith, the establishing of the churches, and the writing of the Holy Scriptures — even their offering up and sacrificing their lives for the witness of Jesus.[11] What may our adversaries think of this argument which proves that the Holy Scriptures, whose perfection and excellency they magnify so much, are impure and imperfect, because they came through impure and imperfect vessels? . . .

Lastly, because it is appropriate to say something here about the *merit* and *reward* of *works*, I shall add something here about our sense and belief concerning that subject. We are far from thinking or believing that man merits anything from God by his works, because all comes from *free grace.*

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[10] Latin: *Spiritus Dei, per quem perficimus ea opera quae ad justificationem valent, omnis labis incapax est*, "The Spirit of God, by whom we carry out those works which are effective for justification, is incapable of any stain."
[11] Latin: *denique, amor ille, & sui-resignatio, qua vitam pro Christo obtulerunt,* "and finally even that love, and self-resignation, by which they offered up their life for Christ."

Therefore we deny the Popish notion of *meritum ex condigno*.[12] Nevertheless we cannot deny that, after he has first communicated to them his holy Grace and Spirit, God, out of his infinite goodness and love for humankind, does recompense and reward the good works of his children in accordance with his own will.

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition VII § ix-xii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 195, 199-200, 202-203; and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 143-144, 146-150.

[12] *Meritum ex condigno* (good works which are fully meritorious) is a term used in Catholic theology, related to the concept of indulgences.