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Good Works.

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(Concluded.)

This is the simple sense of Jas. 2, 14—16. So also the Fathers have always understood it. All other interpretations either clearly violate God's Word, or they are refuted by the clear words of the texts. For example, some say that James contradicts Paul.¹⁾ If that were true, God's curse would rest upon him, for Gal. 1, 8. 9 we read: "But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." The fact is, however, that James did not preach another gospel than Paul. For he taught regeneration by the Word (1, 18) and that we apprehend salvation, *i. e.*, justification, by receiving, *i. e.*, believing, the Word (1, 21).²⁾ It would indeed be well to remember what St. Augustine said in reply to those who declared that the Old and the New Testament contradicted each other. He says, if that were admitted, some might be so insane as to assert that also the New Testament contradicted itself. For just as the former critics place Moses in opposition to John, so the latter might easily make the simple believe that John and Paul are in conflict with each other. However, just as the pure and genuine Christian faith confesses that Paul and John are in harmony, so it also confesses that John and Moses agree with each other.³⁾

1) De Wette, *Kommentar zu Jakobus*, 230.

2) Here James teaches, first, that the Word of God saves; secondly, that this saving Word must be accepted, *i. e.*, believed; thirdly, that it is not sufficient to have received it once [in Holy Baptism] as a noble graft. One must believe it continually.

3) *Nam si esset alius, cujus item dementissimus furor ipsum Novum Testamentum sibi contrarium apud imperitos conaretur ostendere, quid aliud ageret, nisi quemadmodum isti Moysen et Johannem, ita illi Paulum et Johannem tanquam inimicos rixantesque proponeret? Sicut autem sincerissima et verissima fides commendat Pauli Johannisque concordiam, sic Moysi et Johannis pacem intuens . . . amplectitur.* (Augustinus, *Sermones*, Classis I, Serm. I, § 5.)

Others say: "There is indeed harmony between James and Paul, but in this way: Both teach that faith justifies *by* works." 4) The fact is that neither of the two teaches this. For Paul teaches that faith justifies *without* works, Rom. 4, 6; 11, 6; Eph. 2, 9; compare especially Rom. 4, 2 and Jas. 2, 21; and James teaches that faith *and* works justify, Jas. 2, 21. 22. 24. Therefore he who does not admit that Paul is speaking of secret justification and James of public justification had better not attempt to mate fire and water.

Just as little does the attempted solution of Bellarmine agree with the text. His Eminence opines that Paul is speaking of the first justification and James of the second.⁵⁾ That is doubly false; for even according to Bellarmine's way of thinking Paul is not at all speaking of the first justification of Abraham, in his conversion. And on the other hand, the justification of Rahab, Jas. 2, was, according to Bellarmine's way of speaking, not the second, but the first.⁶⁾ So everything whirls in a circle if one turns his back on the simplicity of God's Word.

Still more curious is a solution which the founder of Socinian-

4) This is the solution of the Jesuit Perrone, the fiercest enemy of the Evangelical faith. He writes: *Ideoque novum accepit justificatio Abrahæ incrementum, quia ex fide in fidem progressus est. Hinc Jacobus quoque hoc retulit Geneseos testimonium ad ostendum, fidem sine operibus non justificare, et quoniam fides per opera justificat, ideo per opera ex fide peracta in dies augetur et crescit hæc ipsa justificatio, robustior ac fecundior fit.* (Perrone, *Praelectiones Theologicae*, V, 267.)

5) Nos dicimus, Paulum loqui de prima justificatione, qua homo ex impio fit justus, Jacobum de secunda, qua justus efficitur justior. Et ideo recte Paulum dicere, justificari hominem sine operibus, Jacobum, ex operibus. (Bellarminus, IV, 936.)

6) Even Bellarmine felt this. For he admits (IV, 938) concerning Rahab: *Est exemplum primæ justificationis. Nam probabile est, Raab usque ad illud tempus, quo suscepit nuntios, fuisse non solum meretricem, sed etiam infidelem; and concerning Abraham, that in Rom. 4 his secunda justificatio is meant. And yet the Jesuit remains on the bridge whose beams he has sawed off, for he proceeds: Igitur apostolus Rom. IV loquitur de prima justificatione, tametsi ad probandum exemplum petat a secunda justificatione. And: Sic Jacobus, quum loqueretur de secunda justificatione, attulit exemplum Raab, quod est primæ justificationis. O this tametsi!* And how stealthily does it change itself into a *quum!* When a thief comes into a house, he first treads softly, but gradually he finds his bearings. So, then, Paul, Rom. 4, is speaking of the first justification *although* his example is taken from the second. That is said rather shyly. But now, full force ahead! *While* James takes an example from the second justification he, in his heart, really means the first. Excellent! But would it not have been more logical to conclude: Since Paul takes his example from the second justification, therefore he is also speaking of the second justification; and again, since James takes his example from the first justification, therefore he is speaking of the first? Of course, in that case it would follow that the first justification takes place by faith *and* works, and, *vice versa*, the second by faith alone—a doctrine which fits neither into the Tridentinum nor into any other system. In fact, the lock will not open whether you turn the key to the right or to the left.

ism has discovered. Faustus Socinus suggests that, when James says "works," he means faith.⁷⁾ Verily, an astounding discovery! We wonder what James can mean when he says: "Man is justified by works, and not by faith only." Jas. 2, 24. According to Socinus perhaps this: A man is justified by faith, not by faith only. We would indeed have to be prepared for a considerable change in the entire Christian doctrine if ever the highly ingenious principle should gain ground always to take one of two opposites for the other one.⁸⁾

However, if we take Jas. 2 un mutilated by Socinian and Jesuitical sophistry, it is a clear, wholesome, yes, indispensable chapter. For nowhere else do you find the remedy against carnal misconception of St. Paul's doctrine so concisely in one vessel. One is really tempted to borrow a drop from it and for the purpose of explanation and defense place it, with the author of the Alexandrine manuscript, after Rom. 8, 1. St. Paul rejoices: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The author of the Alexandrine manuscripts adds: "who walk not after the flesh"; and still another one: "but after the Spirit."⁹⁾

This is the doctrine of good works. He who wishes rightly to divide it must understand both the worthlessness and the worth of good works. They do not reconcile to God, neither in the beginning nor in the middle nor in the end of the life of a Christian; for the justification of a sinner before God always takes place purely by grace, purely for Christ's sake, purely gratis, and by faith alone.¹⁰⁾ And how could it be otherwise since all our good works are as filthy rags, Is. 64, 6, and evil lust is always in us? And if one command of God's Law is broken, then we have broken the whole Law. And finally, what are good works? Does not God command us to love

7) Haec opera efficaciam habebunt justificandi coram Deo non quidem ut opera, sed ut fiducia. Nihil autem absurdi est in eo. Siquidem jam dictum est, et opera ista aliud nihil reipsa esse quam fidem. (Faustus Socinus, *De Justificatione*, 123.) [I have condensed the bombast of Socinus somewhat.]

8) Dura admodum est κατάχρησις pro operibus fidem supponere et unum pro altero intelligere in illis, quae sibi invicem ἀντιδιηρημένως opposita. (Walther, *Harmonia*, 856 B.)

9) According to Cod. B, C, A, G, Sin., Paul, in Rom. 8, 1, had only written: Οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν κατάκριμα τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. To this the Cod. Alexandrinus added by way of explanation: μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν; and later a corrector of Cod. Claromontanus with minusculae: ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα. So also Luther, after Gerbelius.

10) "Therefore, whereas and as long as we are occupied with this article of justification, we reject and condemn works, since this article is so constituted that it can admit of no disputation or treatment whatever regarding works." (Luther, quoted in Formula of Concord; *Tri-glossa*, 925.)

Him with all our heart? Works which proceed from such a mind are good. But who is minded that way? Therefore we say with the Apology: Even our best works are unworthy before God. (*Triglotta*, 281), and with Luther: —

The best and holiest deeds must fail
Of all before Thee living;
Before Thee none can boasting stand,
But all must fear Thy strict demand
And live alone by mercy.¹¹⁾

And how could we think of boasting? Even if we really had done all those things which are commanded us, we would still remain unprofitable servants. Luke 17, 10; cp. Matt. 25, 30. Therefore good works are not necessary for salvation,¹²⁾ neither to acquire nor to preserve it.¹³⁾ For we “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,” as Scripture expressly testifies. 1 Pet. 1, 5. Of course, by sins against the conscience faith is lost. Therefore St. Peter exhorts us: “Give diligence to make your calling . . . sure.” 2 Pet. 1, 10. So we are to do good works lest we fall from our calling and lose the Spirit and the gifts which were given us by grace. In so far good works *are* necessary.¹⁴⁾ Yes, they are necessary in general, for God has commanded them in the Old and in the New Testament. Even through James He admonishes us: “If ye fulfil the royal Law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well.”¹⁵⁾ Jas. 2, 8. These works we do not do by constraint, but willingly,¹⁶⁾ being “created in Christ Jesus unto good works . . . that we should walk in them.”¹⁷⁾ Eph. 2, 10. We should also be found in a state of good works that by them our faith may always be known.

“Now, the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
Heb. 13, 20. 21.

11) “Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir,” v. 2; compare Luther, St. Louis Edition, XI, 1731.

12) Formula of Concord; *Triglotta*, 799. 945.

13) Formula of Concord; *Triglotta*, 799. 949.

14) Formula of Concord; *Triglotta*, 947. 948. — Bona opera sunt facienda, ut sit firma vocatio, *i. e.*, ne vocatione sua excidant, si iterum peccent. (E. Hoepfner, *De Justificatione*, 916.)

15) Manifestum igitur est, propositionem illam, quod bona opera sint necessaria, veram esse. (*Repetitio Corporis Doctrinae Christianae*, 105. — Formula of Concord; *Triglotta*, 799. 943. 944.)

16) Formula of Concord; *Triglotta*, 799.

17) The peculiar use of *ἐν* in *ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς* becomes clear from 1 Thess. 4, 7.