

The Necessity of Good Works Unto Salvation, Considered

by John Gill

The necessity of good works in relation to salvation is discussed, and it is concluded that good works are not necessary for salvation, but are necessary for other reasons.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Good Works", "Grace"

Description

John Gill addresses the necessity of good works in relation to salvation, responding to Dr. Abraham Taylor's misrepresentations. He emphasizes that while good works are essential for a believer's life and testimony, they are not a prerequisite for salvation itself, which is solely by grace through faith. Gill argues that good works should follow salvation as evidence of faith, rather than as a means to obtain it. He clarifies that the doctrine of grace does not negate the importance of good works but rather affirms their role in glorifying God and demonstrating true faith. Ultimately, Gill defends the position that good works are necessary for the believer's walk but not for the attainment of salvation.

Transcript

THE NECESSITY

OF

GOOD WORKS UNTO SALVATION,

CONSIDERED:

OCCASIONED BY SOME

Reflections and Misrepresentations of Dr. Abraham Taylor,

in a Pamphlet of his lately published, called, An Address to young Students in Divinity, by way of Caution against some Paradoxes, which lead to Doctrinal Antinomianism.

Above six years ago I sent a printed letter to the Gentleman whose name stands in the title-page to this, on account of some ill usage of myself, and contemptuous treatment of some doctrines of grace; to which

he never thought fit to return an answer. The impression of that letter quickly went off, and I have frequently been solicited by my friends to reprint that, and my Discourses on Justification; but could never be prevailed upon to do any thing of that kind till now for no other reason but this; I saw that he and his friends were not inclined to enter into a controversy about these things, and I did not chose to move it afresh, or appear forward to it, which I thought reprinting would look like, or might be so interpreted; and therefore I determined to sit still, and only defend myself when any attacks were made upon me.

In this resolution. I have persisted, notwithstanding the little, mean, and disingenuous methods this Gentleman has made use of, to render my character odious among men. The letter above mentioned was not written with any design to provoke to wrath and anger; nor is there a single sentence, that I can remember in it, that has any tendency that way: But it seems a grudge was conceived, which has been broiling upon his heart ever since, and now at this distance of time he, takes up a single phrase, and inveighs against it with the utmost wrath and fury; whereby he has most sadly verified that observation of the wise man, that anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

A controversy has of late been moved, or at least revived, by some ministers of the Independent denomination, about the duty of unconverted persons to believe in Christ, or about the nature of that faith which such are obliged to; a controversy in which I have had no immediate concern: And whereas it has been given out, that a book published not long ago, called, A further Enquiry after Truth, is of my writing, though another man's name stands to it; I take this opportunity of declaring to the world, in justice to the worthy author of it whose name it bears, and that I may not take the credit of another man's labours, that there is not one single sentence of mine in it; nor did I see the author when he came to town to print, nor his performance, until it was in the press, who I doubt not will give a proper reply to the notice taken of him.

The Gentleman I am now concerned with, has thought fit to nibble at this controversy; and which he might have done without meddling with me, since what he has broke his gall about, has no relation to that. He tells the society to whom he dedicates this miserable pamphlet, that he "was glad that an opportunity offered to declare against tenets, which can answer no purpose, but to weaken men's obligation to duty and holiness, and to lead to gross Antinomianism." But had he not an opportunity six or seven years ago of declaring against, not only this single tenet he has now taken notice of, but several others which he imagines has the same tendency, and of attempting a confutation of them, had he either a head or a heart for such a service ?

For some mouths past, we have been alarmed of this mighty work, that a learned doctor had conceived, and that in a short time the mountain would bring forth. But while we were waiting for, and expecting to see the wondrous birth, out turns a silly mouse, according to the poet's words: Parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.

The particular tenet, or principle struck at, is, "that good works are not necessary to salvation, not in any sense; no, not is the antecedent to the consequent." This is called "a filthy dream, a dangerous paradox, an unscriptural absurdity, (Address, &c. p. 5) an extravagant position, (p. 6) a dangerous tenet, big with absurdity; a horrible blasphemy, (p. 7) the senseless paradox, (p. 9) rude and ignorant blasphemy; (p. 10) the blasphemy invented by one of the vilest and lewdest heretics; (p. 12) the draff of those who turned the grace of God into wantonness; and, to close all, an Antinomian paradox." (p. 13) When these ill names and hard words are taken out, there is very little left for me to reply unto.

And whether the doctrine opposed deserves such ill language, will be better judged of, when the terms of this proposition, "Good works are not necessary to salvation," and the sense of it, are explained. By good works are meant, not the work of sanctification, principle of grace or internal holiness, which though it is sometimes styled the good work, (Phil. 1:6) yet is not the work of man, but the work of the spirit of God, and is therefore called the sanctification of the spirit. (1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:13) This I firmly believe is absolutely necessary to eternal happiness, both in infants and adult persons, and that without it neither the one nor the other can ever see the Lord; sanctifying grace being an essential and initial part of salvation, or that branch of grace and salvation which the elect of God and redeemed of the Lamb are first made actually partakers of in their own persons, in order to their enjoyment of the heavenly glory.

This man must be conscious to himself that I have expressed myself to this purpose in my letter to him; and yet he most basely insinuates that I hold, and represents me as saying, that "A conformity to him (Christ) in holiness, is not antecedently necessary to our reigning with him in light and glory." (Address &c. p. 13) If by conformity to holiness, is meant that internal conformity of the soul to Christ, the produce of divine grace in regeneration and sanctification; it is a thought that never entered into my head nor heart, and which I abhor.

Passive holiness, or that holiness of heart which makes a soul like to Christ, and is no other than Christ formed in it, or his image instamped upon it, in the production of which it is entirely passive, is absolutely necessary to the everlasting enjoyment of him; yea, I believe that an outward conformity to Christ in conversation, or active holiness, external holiness of life, is absolutely necessary to evidence the truth of holiness of heart in all that are saved, who are either capable, or have an opportunity of performing it, and shewing it forth.

This writer almost all along takes the liberty of altering the state of the question before us, and instead of good works puts holiness; thereby to suggest to his readers that I deny the necessity of sanctification to complete happiness; which as it is an iniquitous proceeding, so it gives us a specimen of his skill in the management of a regular controversy he prates about. Nor by good works are to be understood the internal acts and exercises of grace, as faith, hope, and love; for though these are our acts, under the influence of divine grace, and so may be called our works, though not with much propriety, and as such good ones; yet these do not usually go by the name of good works, either in scripture, or in the writings of good men, or in our common way of speaking.

This I mention to stop the mouths of some silly cavillers, who I perceive are fond of objecting these things. Though even these acts and exercises of grace cannot be thought to be so absolutely necessary to salvation, as that it cannot possibly be without them; since infants, as soon as born, though they may be capable of having the principles of faith, hope and love, implanted in them, yet I apprehend they cannot be capable of acting or exercising these graces: If therefore without these acts and exercises of grace persons cannot be saved, these must stand excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

By good works, I understand a series of external holiness; not a single action or two, but a course of living soberly, righteously, and godly; a constant performance of religious duties and exercises, in the outward life and conversation: In this sense, and in this only, am I to be understood in the proposition before us, and in all that I have said, or shall say concerning it. It may be proper next to inquire what is the meaning of the word necessary, and in what sense good works are so.

That they are necessary to be done, or ought to be done, by all that hope to be saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, is readily granted; but not in point of salvation, in order to that, or with a view to obtain it. Good works are necessary to be done, on account of the divine ordination and appointment; for such as are the workmanship of God are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that they should walk in them, (Eph. 2:10) They are necessary, necessitate precepti & debiti, on account of, the will and command of God, and of that obedience we owe to God, both as creatures, and as new creatures.

They are necessary upon the score of obligation we lie under to him, and in point of gratitude for the numerous mercies we receive from him, and that by them both we and others may glorify him our Father which is in heaven. They are necessary to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour; to recommend religion to others, to testify the truth of our faith, and give evidence of the reality of internal holiness. They are necessary for the good of our neighbours, and for the stopping of the mouths of our enemies.

These things I have more largely observed and asserted in my letter to this man; all which he conceals from his readers, and most vilely suggests to them, that I have vented the same notion, and am of the same opinion with Simon Magus, Carpocrates, and their followers; who held that salvation was through faith and love, but that other good works were not necessary; but were to be looked upon by men as indifferent in their own nature, being neither good nor evil; nothing being naturally evil, and so might or might not be done: Things I never thought of, and of which I have the utmost abhorrence and detestation.

With what face or conscience could he insinuate any thing of this kind, when I have so fully expressed myself upon the necessity of doing good works? But what will not a man say, intoxicated with passion? True indeed, I cannot say that good works are necessary to salvation, that is to obtain it; which is the only sense in which they can be said with any propriety to be necessary to it, or in which such a proposition can be understood; and which I charge as a Popish and Socinian tenet, and hope I shall ever oppose, as long as I have tongue to speak, or a pen to write with, and am capable of using either.

Salvation may be considered, either in the contrivance of it from eternity, in the mind and counsel of God; and the designation of persons to it; or in the impetration of it in time by Christ; or in the application of it in effectual vocation by the Spirit of God; or in the entire consummate enjoyment of it in heaven. In every of these views of it, good works are not necessary to it: Not to the contrivance of it, and designation of persons to it. God when in his infinite wisdom he drew the scheme of salvation in Christ, fixed upon him to be the author of it, and appointed men unto it by him, was not moved hereunto by any works of his creatures, or by any foresight of them; they were then no moving causes with God, no conditions of salvation fixed by him, nor were as the antecedent to the consequent; no, not in the prescience or fore-knowledge of God: As they could not go before, so they were not fore-viewed by God, as any cause, condition, motive, or reason of his choosing one to salvation, and not another; For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth. (Rom. 9:11) Good works are the consequents and fruits of election to salvation, not antecedent to it.

Nor are they necessary to the impetration or obtaining of it in time by Christ: These did not move Christ to engage in this work, they were no ways assisting to him in it; they did not help it forward, or in the least contribute to the performance of it, which was done entirely and completely without them. Nor was it effected by him on condition of men's performing good works, nor were they necessary to it, as the antecedent to the consequent; they did not antecede or go before it, no, not in the divine mind or

consideration, and in the view of Christ; for men were then considered, not as having done good works, but as evil amid wicked; for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, and obtained eternal redemption by his blood; and when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. (Rom. 5:8, 10) Good works do not go before, but follow after redeeming grace: Christ gave himself for his people, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:14) Nor are they necessary to time application of salvation by the Spirit of God in effectual calling, neither as causes or conditions, or as the antecedent to the consequent; they can be no moving causes to it, nor do they come into consideration in the divine mind, as the reason or condition of it; they are not the rule and measure of God's procedure in this affair; he saves and calls with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace. (2 Tim. 1:9) Besides, before regeneration, before effectual vocation, before a principle of grace is wrought in the soul, before the new-creation-work is formed, which is the initial part of salvation, or that branch of it which God's elect are first actually made partakers of in their own persons, there are properly speaking no good works done by them, or can be done by them; and therefore cannot possibly be antecedent to salvation viewed in this light, but must be consequent to it: We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. (Eph. 2:10) Nor, lastly, are they necessary to the consummate enjoyment of salvation in heaven, no, not as the antecedent to the consequent; that is, as an antecedent cause to a consequent effect, which is the easy, common and natural sense of the phrase; for who can hear of an antecedent to a consequent, unless by way of illation, but must at once conceive of that consequent as an effect depending upon the antecedent as a cause?

Wherefore if good works are antecedent to glorification as a consequent, then glorification must be, and will be considered as an effect depending upon good works as its cause. And as it will be difficult to fix any other sense upon the phrase, and persons are and will be naturally led so to conceive of it, this, and this alone, is a sufficient reason why it ought to be rejected and disused. This man himself will not say that good works are necessary as antecedent causes, or as antecedent conditions of salvation or glorification: Let him then tell us in what sense they are necessary, as the antecedent to the consequent.

His performance is An address to young students in divinity, and he takes upon him to be a tutor and director of them in their studies; but leaves them in the dark, and does not offer to inform them in what sense good works are necessary, as the antecedent to the consequent. Will he say they are necessary as antecedent means of salvation? This is all one as to say they are necessary as antecedent causes, for every mean is a cause of that of which it is a mean. Will he assert that they are necessary, as an antecedent meetness or fitness for heaven?

This must be denied. How can our poor, impure and imperfect works, our righteousnesses which are as filthy rags, make us meet and fit for the heavenly glory? No, it is not works of righteousness done by us, but the Spirit's work of grace within us, which will be performed until the day of Christ, which is the saints meetness for eternal happiness. Will he say That good works are such necessary antecedents to salvation, though he does not choose to say or cannot say what, as that salvation cannot possibly be enjoyed where they do not go before?

I have, in my letter to him, given instances to the contrary; proving that salvation is, where good works do not go before; as in the case of elect infants, and of persons called by grace in their last hours, when just ready to launch into eternity. If this doctrine is true, that good works are so absolutely necessary to salvation, that there can be no possibility of any, where they do not go before; what an horrible scene must this open to parents of children, who lose by death many, or most or all of them in their infancy? since, upon this principle, they must for ever despair of their eternal happiness.

One should think that such a man as this I am concerned with, would have took care to put in a saving clause in favour of infants, especially them suggested to him; who supposes that all the infants of believers are interested in the covenant of grace, and consequently must be saved, at least those who die in their infancy; and if saved, they must be saved without good works, which they neither do, nor are capable of doing. Maresius, I observe, when treating of the necessity of doing good works, for such ends and uses as have been already mentioned, and which nobody denies, adds; "But this necessity is to be restrained to adult believers, who are able to perform outward good works; for the infants of believers are saved without them (even as they were sinners without any properly personal act of their own) though not without an inclination to them, by the grace and spirit of regeneration."

Moreover, upon this principle, what hope can surviving relations entertain of their adult deceased friends; who though they have appeared to have had full convictions of their lost and miserable state by nature, clear views of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, an abhorrence of it, and repentance for it, to have seen the insufficiency of any works of the creature to justify before God, and render acceptable to him; the necessity of salvation alone by Christ; and to express some degree of faith in him and hope of the heavenly inheritance yet because they have not lived a regular life in the of health, have not gone through a course of good works, have not lived soberly righteously and godly in this present world, must he therefore everlastingly banished from the realms of light?

What comfort can a man of this principle be a means of administering? or what comfortable words can he speak to a poor creature become truly sensible of sin, and his lost estate, of his need of Christ, and salvation by him, on a death-bed? Can he, though he is satisfied he has a true and thorough sense of things, encourage him to believe in Christ, and hope in him for everlasting life and salvation? No, he cannot; he must be obliged to tell him that it is too late to think or talk of these things, there is no hope for him; for since he has lived a vicious life, hell must be his portion; for where good works, a religious life and conversation, do not go before, there can be no consequent happiness.

Whereas, on the other hand, according to our principle, parents may hope for the salvation of their infants that die in infancy; there is at least a possibility of it, whereas there is none in the other scheme; surviving relatives may rejoice, in hope of their deceased friends being gone to glory, who they have reason to believe have been called by grace, though at the last hour; ministers and others are capable of speaking words of peace and consolation to distressed minds, whose hearts are pricked and become contrite on their dying beds: All which is a full confutation of what this writer asserts, that "it is absolutely impossible that it" (this tenet, that good works are not necessary to salvation) "should do good to any person whatsoever."

I readily own, that good works are necessary to be performed by all that are walking in the way to heaven, and expect to be saved by Christ, and glorified with him, who are either capable or have an opportunity of performing them; but then they are not necessary as causes, conditions, or means of procuring glory and happiness for them; nor are they necessary as the antecedent to the consequent, to pave their way to heaven, to prepared and make them meet for it; or to put them into the possession of it: they do not go before in army such sense, or for any such use; they follow after Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. (Rev. 14:13) It is said, (Address, &c. p. 6) that it cannot possibly be for the advantage of a saint or a sinner, to be told that good works are in no sense necessary to salvation, not as the antecedent to the consequent; and that it may do a great deal of harm and mischief to the one and the other.

I have already shewn it may be for the advantage, use, peace, and comfort of poor sensible sinners on their death-beds, and of surviving saints: Nor dot see what harm or mischief it can do to saints, lively or declining ones, or to profane sinners; not to lively judicious christians, who are taught and encouraged by this doctrine to continue zealous of good works, and diligently to perform them, for many valuable, necessary uses though not order to salvation. What, will no motive induce a lively christian to do good works, but what is taken and urged from the necessity of them unto salvation?

Or can he be a judicious one, that acts from such a principle? Cannot a declining christian be induced to do his first works, unless he is told they are absolutely necessary to his salvation? Cannot it be thought that arguments, taker from the command and will of God, from the glory of God, the honour of Christ, religion and truth, a man's own and his neighbour's good, demonstrating the necessity of doing good works, may be made use of as means to quicken his diligence, to cast off his spiritual sloth and carnal security, without insisting upon the necessity of them to salvation?

Nor can it tend to harden sinners in sin, or put them upon running into greater transgressions, or induce them to harbour such a conceit, that in may get to heaven, let them live as they please; when they are told, that though good works cannot save them, their evil works may damn them, or be the cause of damnation to them. As for the texts of scripture produced by this writer, they are all of them impertinently alleged, and none of them at all to the purpose. Some of them do not relate to good works, but to internal holiness, the sanctification of the Spirit, as 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14; Hebrews 7:14 which is that grace God chooses his people to, in order to their enjoyment of glory; and without which, and that as perfect, for so it will be made by the Spirit of God, they cannot see or enjoy the Lord; and therefore it becomes them, by constant application at the throne of grace, to follow after a daily increase of it, and by their lives and conversations to evidence the truth amid reality of it.

Others only express tire necessity of doing good works to testify the truth of faith, or contain motives in them to the performance of them; taken partly from the grace of God bestowed upon the saints here, and from the consideration of that happiness and glory they shall enjoy hereafter, as the fruits of grace, and not as the fruits and consequents of their works as James 1:17, &c.; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 20, 21; 1 John 3:1-3. And it is easy to observe, that the whole current of scripture, and especially tire Epistles, run this way, to exclude works entirely from having any hand or concern in the justification and salvation of men.

The passage out of Clement, I suppose, is chiefly produced to grace his margin with a large citation in Greek; since it only sets forth the duty of those to perform good works, who would be found among the number of such who wait for God, and desire to partake of his promised gifts: for certain it is, that Clement did not think that good works were necessary to justification or glorification; seeing he expressly excludes them from either, when he says, "All are glorified and magnified, not by themselves or by their works or righteous actions which they have done, but by his own will: So we also, being called by his will in Christ Jesus, are justified; not by ourselves, nor by our wisdom, or understanding, or piety, or works, which we have done in holiness of heart; but by that faith, by which the Almighty God hath justified all from the beginning, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen." We are next entertained with the rise and original of this tenet, that "good works are not necessary to salvation." And it seems, according to our leaned author, (Address, &c. p. 11) that Simon Magus was the first broacher of it; And we are exposed as his disciples and followers; and some pains are taken to tell an idle, filthy story, of Simon's picking up a whore in a bawdy-house at Tyre, and committing fornication with her; no doubt with a view to insinuate to his readers, that our principles being alike, our practice must

be so too; or, at least, that our principles have the same tendency.

But if it should appear that Simon's tenets and ours are not the same, what will become of this little show of reading, and the mean artifice made use of to expose us to scorn and contempt? As for Simon's saying that salvation is by grace, and not by works, this was a doctrine he had from the apostles themselves; which he turned into wantonness, and abused to vile purposes; and is in itself never the worse, nor is it to be thought the worse of, for his ill use of it: And as for the inference made from this doctrine, that therefore good works are not necessary; this is none of ours, we disclaim it; there is no agreement between Simon's tenet and ours, about good works; he urged they were not necessary to be done, we plead for the necessity of doing them, for the ends before mentioned, and which need not be repeated.

Simon, Carpocrates, and their followers, who are represented as being in the same sentiments, held that every thing, besides faith and love, were things indifferent, neither good nor bad in their own nature, and so might be done or omitted. But can this man, with any face or conscience, say that these are our sentiments? We affirm, that good works are in themselves good, cannot be dispensed with, but ought to be performed by all men; the tenet of these men was, that good works were not necessary at all in any sense, not necessary to be done.

Where is the likeness, the agreement? Give me leave, on this occasion, to inquire into the rise and original, and to point out the authors, abettors, and maintainers of the contrary tenet, that good works are necessary to salvation. The false apostles in Judea, and other judaizing professors, were the first broachers of this notion who taught the brethren, not only that circumcision, but that obedience to the law of Moses, the moral as well as ceremonial law, was necessary to salvation: see Acts 15:1, 5 which gave the true apostles and primitive churches a great deal of trouble.

To confute which, the apostle Paul especially greatly laboured in all his writings, and particularly in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. The Papists, the followers of the man of sin, have always been the abettors and maintainers of this principle; and so has Socinus, and his wretched adherents. The first among the reformed divines that vented it, was George Major, contemporary and familiar with Luther and Melancthon: He has been represented by some, from whom one should not have expected to have had such a character of him on this account, as satellites Romani Pontificis, a person employed by the Pope of Rome; a tool of the Popish party to create divisions and disturbances among the Reformed.

The Papists finding they could not maintain with success their notion, that good works were meritorious of salvation, instead of the phrase, meritorious of salvation, substituted the other phrase, necessary to salvation, as being a softer one, in order to gain upon incautious minds; when one and the same thing were designed by both. And this man was thought to be the instrument they made use of for this purpose. But however this be, certain it is, that the broaching of this doctrine by him gave great offence, and occasioned much disturbance.

The writer of his Life intimates, that the consequences of it gave Major himself some concern; and that he declared in so many words, that "whereas he saw that some were offended, for the future he would no more make use of that proposition." Among the chief of his opposers was Nicolaus Amsdorfius, who in great heat and zeal asserted, in contradiction to Major's notion, that "good works were hurtful and dangerous to salvation ;" a position not to be defended unless when good works are put in the room of Christ, and are trusted to for salvation: But it is not doing of them, that is or can be hurtful to salvation, but depending on them when done.

This controversy raised great troubles in the churches and gave Melancthon a good deal of uneasiness; who at first was ensnared into the use of the phrase, though he afterwards rejected it, as improper and dangerous. Amsdorfius did not deny that good works were to be done, but could not be prevailed upon to own that they were necessary. Melancthon at length allowed that "good works were not necessary to salvation;" nor did he dare to assert it: "For these reasons," says he, "we teach that good works; or new obedience, are necessary; yet this must not by any means be tacked to it, that good works are necessary to obtain salvation and eternal life."

In his answer to the pastors of Saxony, he has these words: "Nevertheless, let us not use this phrase, good works are necessary to salvation." And, in another place, "Verily I say, that I do not make use of this phrase, good works are necessary to salvation; but I affirm, that these propositions are true, and properly and without sophistry thus to be declared; new obedience is necessary, or good works are necessary; because obedience is due to God, according to that saying, Debtors we are."

Now these were the sentiments, and which are exactly ours of the great Melancthon, that peaceable man, who never was charged within running into extremes in controversy; his greatest fault, and which has been complained of by some of his friends, who have had a great regard to him and his memory, was, that he was for composing differences, almost at any rate, sometimes, as was thought, to the injury of truth, and with the hazard of losing it. I could easily produce a large number of learned and holy men, who have asserted the same thing: I shall content myself with transcribing twelve arguments, shewing that good works are not necessary to salvation, drawn up by that learned and judicious divine Abraham Calovius; who has deserved much of all men of learning and true Christianity, for his learned animadversions on Grotius's Annotations on several passages in the Psalms and Prophets, relating to the Messiah; and for his laborious confutation of Socinus and his followers, and his excellent defence of the orthodox faith against them.

They are as follow. The question put is, "Whether good works are necessary to salvation?" The Socinians, says he, affirm this; but this opinion is deservedly rejected. 1. Because no such thing is ever to be found in the scriptures, namely, that good works are necessary to salvation. But if this was so principal a part of evangelic truth, as the adversaries plead, it should, upon the foot of the Socinians hypothesis, be contained in express words in the scriptures; since they assert, that all things necessary to be known for salvation, are contained expressly in the scriptures. 2.

The apostle treating of the causes of our salvation, removes good works, and entirely excludes them; and teaches, that he only has blessedness, to whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Romans 4:6. Compare Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5. If therefore good works are entirely excluded from the causes of salvation, how will the same be necessary to salvation? 3. That which is not necessary to our justification, that is not necessary to salvation; because there are no other causes of salvation than of justification: But good works are not necessary to justification.

Ergo, 4. If we are saved by grace, then good works are not necessary to salvation; for the antithesis remains firm, If of grace, then not of works, otherwise grace is not grace, Romans 11:6. But the former is true, Romans 6:23. Ephesians 2:8, 9. therefore the latter also. 5. If by the obedience of one Christ we all obtain justification of life and salvation, then we are not saved by our own proper obedience: But the former is true, Romans 5:17-19, therefore also the latter. 6.

What is ascribed to faith alone, as it is contradistinguished from works, that is not to be attributed to works: But eternal salvation is ascribed to faith alone, John 3:16; Mark 16:16; Romans 1:17 and 4:6; Galatians 3:11; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5. Hebrew 10:38. Ergo, 7. What is necessary to salvation, that, as much as it is necessary, is prescribed and required in the evangelic doctrine, Romans 1:16. and 3:27. But good works, as necessary to salvation, are not prescribed in the gospel, which is not conversant about works, but only about faith in Christ, John 3:16 and 6:40; Romans 1:17 and 4:6, seeing the law is the doctrine of works, the gospel the doctrine of faith, Romans 3:27; Galatians 3:12. 8.

Add to this, that this assertion concerning the necessity of good works to salvation, has been already rejected as false, in the false apostles, Acts 15:5, where an opposition is formed to the sentiment of the apostles, that we are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, and that we are saved by the keeping of the law, or works, and that the keeping of the law is necessary to salvation. 9. If good works were necessary to salvation, we should have whereof to glory; but the holy Spirit takes away all glorying from us, and for this very reason excludes good works from hence, Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Romans 3:27 and 4:1, 2. 10. If our election to salvation is of grace, and not of works, as the apostle teaches, Ephesians 1:4-6; 2 Timothy 1:9, good works cannot be asserted to be necessary to salvation; for as we are chosen from eternity, so we are saved in time. 11. By whatsoever doctrine the certainty of our salvation is weakened or destroyed, that ought to be rejected: But such is the doctrine of the Socinians, Ergo, 12. Wherever the scripture produces reasons for which good works are necessary, it mentions quite others, than that they are necessary to salvation; namely, that we ought diligently to perform good works, because of God, because of Christ, because of the holy Spirit, because of the holy angels, because of our neighbour, because of ourselves, yea, even because of the devil.

Thus this excellent writer, confuting the Socinian error, that good works are necessary to salvation, strongly defends the contrary; which our Theologaster calls a filthy dream, horrible blasphemy, &c. This it seems, is one of the paradoxes which lead to doctrinal Antinomianism. But why a paradox? A paradox, in the ancient use of the word, signified a most certain truth, at least embraced as such by men of wisdom and learning, though contrary to the opinion of the vulgar; which being unusual, struck them with surprise; whence such verities were sometimes called *paradoxa*, and sometimes *admirabilia*.

This use of the word, I suppose, will not be allowed to be applicable to this tenet. A paradox, in the modern use of the word, or in common acceptance, designs a proposition that carries in it either a real or seeming self-contradiction. Now the proposition, good works are not necessary to salvation, is plain and easy to be understood; and is either true or false, but no paradox. We need not go far for instances of paradoxes, this writer can furnish us with enough: As when he says, "Salvation is all of free grace, and good works, the fruits of holiness, a part of salvation, are absolutely necessary to complete salvation."

The word complete, in this proposition, is so placed, as that it may be thought to be either a verb of the infinitive mood; and then the sense is, salvation is all of grace, and yet good works are absolutely necessary to complete it; or as an adjective to the word salvation; and then the sense is, salvation is all of grace, and good works are absolutely necessary to salvation complete without them: Take it either way, the self-contradiction is manifest enough. As also, when giving the character of a deceased minister of the gospel, whose ashes he might have spared; he says, (Address, &c. p. 14) "he was a person of real piety, but discovered so much pride and wrath in his writings and conduct," (By the way, how could a man so wretchedly guilty of these things, write this without shame and blushing?)

"that it is hard to account for it; except we allow, that he had a tincture of enthusiasm." The first of these instances is a real self-contradiction, and the other, at least, a seeming one; and both paradoxes. Again; why should this proposition, good works are not necessary to salvation, be represented as leading to doctrinal Antinomianism? This man ought to have informed his students what doctrinal Antinomianism is. Since he has not, I will. Doctrinal Antinomianism, properly speaking, is a denying, or setting aside the law of God, as a rule of life, action, or conversation.

Now what tendency has the above proposition to such a notion? Or how does it appear, that the very quintessence of doctrinal Antinomianism is couched in it, as is suggested? (Address, &c. p. 5) Though we say, that good works are not necessary to salvation; do we say, that they are not necessary to any thing else? Do we say, that they are not necessary to be done? Do we say, that they are not necessary to be done in obedience to the law of God? Do we say, that the commands of the law are not to be regarded by men?

That they are things indifferent, that may be done, or not done? No; we say none of these things, but all the reverse. Do we then make void the law through this doctrine? God forbid: Yea, we establish the law, (Rom. 3:31) as it is in the hands of Christ our Lawgiver; to which we desire to yield a cheerful obedience; to shew our subjection to him as King of saints, and to testify our gratitude for the many blessings of every kind we receive from him. It is not worth my while to take notice of the flirt (Address, &c. p. 35) at the everlasting love of the divine persons being on all accounts the same, yesterday, to day, and for ever; which he knows, in his own conscience, only regards that love as in the breast of the divine persons, and not the manifestations of it; which are more or less to different persons, and so, to the same persons at different times.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-gill/the-necessity-of-good-works-unto-salvation-considered/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net