

Works Before and After Justification

by J.H. Newman

The sermon explores the relationship between works and justification, highlighting the distinction between works done before and after justification, and the role of faith and divine influence in this process.

Scripture: Acts 10:4, Romans 3:28, Ephesians 2:10, James 2:24

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Good Works"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches on the contrast between works done before and after justification, emphasizing that works before justification do not please God as they do not spring from faith in Jesus Christ and are considered to have the nature of sin. On the other hand, works after justification, which are the fruits of faith, are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ. The sermon delves into the importance of divine aid in performing good works, highlighting that even works before justification, when done with God's help, can lead to receiving the grace of justification, as seen in the example of Cornelius.

Transcript

Articles xii. & xiii. -- "Works done before the grace of CHRIST, and the inspiration of HIS SPIRIT, [before justification, title of the Article,] are not pleasant to God (minimè Deo grata sunt); forasmuch as they spring not of Faith in JESUS CHRIST, neither do they make man meet to receive grace, or (as the school authors say) deserve grace of congruity (merentur gratiam de congruo); yea, rather for that they are not done as GOD hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin. Albeit good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification (justificatos sequuntur), cannot put away (expiare) our sins, and endure the severity of GOD'S judgment, yet are they pleasing and acceptable (grata et accepta) to GOD in CHRIST, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith."

Two sorts of works are here mentioned -- works before justification, and works after; and they are most strongly contrasted with each other.

Works before justification, are done "before the grace of CHRIST, and the inspiration of His SPIRIT."

Works before "do not spring of Faith in JESUS CHRIST;" works after are "the fruits of Faith."

3. Works before "have the nature of sin;" works after are "good works."

4. Works before "are not pleasant to GOD;" works after "are pleasing and acceptable (grata et accepta) to GOD."

Two propositions, mentioned in these Articles, remain, and deserve consideration; First, that works before justification do not make or dispose men to receive grace, or as the school writers say, deserve grace of congruity; secondly, that works after "cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of GOD'S judgment.

As to the former statement,--to deserve de congruo, or of congruity, is to move the Divine regard, not from any claim upon it, but from a certain fitness or suitableness; as, for instance, it might be said that dry wood had a certain disposition or fitness towards heat which green wood had not. Now, the Article denies that works done before the grace of CHRIST, or in a mere state of nature, in this way dispose towards grace, or move GOD to grant grace. And it asserts, with or without reason, (for it is a question of historical fact, which need not specially concern us,) that certain schoolmen maintained the affirmative.

Now, that this is what it means, is plain from the following passages of the Homilies, which in no respect have greater claims upon us than as comments upon the Articles:--

"Therefore they that teach repentance without a lively faith in our S

AVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, do teach none other but Judas's repentance, as all the schoolmen do, which do only allow these three parts of repentance,--the contrition of the heart, the confession of the moth, and the satisfaction of the work. But all these things we find in Judas's repentance, which, in outward appearance, did far exceed and pass the repentance of Peter. . . . This was commonly the penance which CHRIST enjoined sinners, 'Go thy way, and sin no more;' which penance we shall never be able to fulfil, without the special grace of Him that doth say, 'Without Me, ye can do nothing.'"--On Repentance, p. 460.

To take a passage which is still more clear:

"As these examples are not brought in to the end that we should thereby take a boldness to sin, presuming on the mercy and goodness of G

OD, but to the end that, if, through the frailness of our own flesh, and the temptation of the devil, we fall into the like sins, we should in no wise despair of the mercy and goodness of GOD: even so must we beware and take heed, that we do in no wise think in our hearts, imagine, or believe, that we are able to repent aright, or to turn effectively unto the LORD by our own might and strength." Ibid. part i. fin.

The Article contemplates these two states,--one of justifying grace, and one of the utter destitution of grace; and it says, that those who are in utter destitution cannot do anything to gain justification; and indeed, to assert the contrary would be Pelagianism. However, there is an intermediate state, of which the Article says nothing, but which must not be forgotten, as being an actually existing one. Men are not always either in light or in darkness, but are sometimes between the two; they are sometimes not in a state of Christian justification, yet not utterly deserted by GOD, but in a state of something like that of Jews or of Heathen, turning to the thought of religion. They are not gifted with habitual grace, but they still are visited by Divine influences, or by actual grace, or rather aid; and these influences are the first-fruits of the grace of justification going before it, and are intended to lead on to it, and to be perfected in it, as twilight leads to day. And since it is a Scripture maxim, that "he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much;" and "to whosoever hath, to him shall be given;" therefore, it is quite true that works done with divine aid, and in faith, before justification, do dispose men to receive the grace of justification;--such were Cornelius's alms, fastings, and prayers, which led to his baptism. At the same time it must be borne in

mind that, even in such cases, it is not the works themselves which make them meet, as some schoolmen seem to have said, but the secret aid of GOD, vouchsafe, equally with the "grace and Spirit," which is the portion of the baptized, for the merits of CHRIST'S sacrifice.

[But it may be objected, that the silence observed in the Article about a state between that of justification and grace, and that of neither, is a proof that there is none such. This argument, however, would prove too much; for in like manner there is a silence in the Sixth Article about a judge of the scripturalness of doctrine, yet a judge there must be. And again, few, it is supposed, would deny that Cornelius, before the angel came to him, was in a more hopeful state, than Simon Magus or Felix. The difficult then, if there be one, is common to persons of whatever school of opinion.]

2. If works before justification, when done by the influence of divine aid, gain grace, much more do works after justification. They are, according to the Article, "grata," pleasing to GOD;" and they are accepted, "accepta" which means that GOD rewards them, and that of course according to their degree of excellence. At the same time, as works before justification may nevertheless be done under a divine influence, so works after justification are still liable to the infection of original sin; and, as not being perfect, "cannot expiate our sins," or "endure the severity of GOD'S judgment."

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