

an essay:

ON FAITH AND GOOD WORKS IN THE BOOK OF JAMES

Robert Baral
12/14/2005 AD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

II. ON ARTICLE XI - OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF MAN

III. ON ARTICLE XII - OF GOOD WORKS

IV. WHERE JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND GOOD WORKS MEET

V. IN CLOSING

I. INTRODUCTION

In reading Articles XI and XII of the Anglican confession of Christian Faith known as the "39 Articles of Religion," what would a response from St. James look like? Article XI is titled, "Of The Justification of Man" ¹ and Article XII is titled, "Of Good Works," ² which taken together offers a starting point for answering our question. Saint James declares the answer to us in JAMES 2:20: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" ³

St. James was known as "James The Just" and was a "pillar" of the early Jerusalem Church. He wrote the Book of JAMES circa 60 AD, about two years before his martyrdom. Scofield comments that St. James wrote in JAMES on the theme of true religion, where "outward religious service [is] the expression and proof of [true] faith. He does not exalt works as against faith, but faith as producing works." ⁴ The connection between faith and good works, seen through the eyes of St. James and embodied in Articles XI and XII of The Anglican 39 Articles of Religion, is the object of this essay.

II. ON ARTICLE XI - OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF MAN

Article XI of The 39 Articles is titled, "Of the Justification of Man." Its text is as follows: "We are accounted righteous before GOD, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification." ⁵

It is true that "we are accounted righteous before GOD, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST by Faith and not for our own works or deservings." ⁶ We read in JAMES 2 of the question of faith without good works, in that a true Christian

¹ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XI is titled, "Of The Justification of Man."

² 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XII is titled, "Of Good Works."

³ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:20.

⁴ 3, Scofield Study Bible, JAMES, overview commentary on "The General Epistle of JAMES," p 1306.

⁵ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XI, "Of The Justification of Man."

⁶ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XI, "Of The Justification of Man."

can not have one without the other. For JAMES 2:17 says, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." ⁷ And that justifying faith GOD saw in Abraham, for JAMES 2:23 says, "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed GOD, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of GOD." ⁸

But how are we to discern if we ourselves have a living faith or a dead faith? How do we know our brother is truly justified before The LORD? Through what sign can we feel confident that "we are accounted righteous before GOD?" Is it enough for us to merely speak The Name of CHRIST and ascent to the concept that "only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST" are we reconciled to The Father? No, it is not! For if we mouth "this most wholesome Doctrine" and yet continue on in our sins, we are no friend of GOD, nor are we justified before Him. ⁹

So when Article XI says, "Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort," the Christian man is offered true certain hope in salvation for the merits of our Lord JESUS CHRIST and His sacrifice on our behalf. ¹⁰ How then are we to answer the question found in JAMES 2:21, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" ¹¹

The answer to this question lies in JAMES 2:22, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" ¹² Abraham's unshakable faith in GOD was seen in his works, which brought him to the very edge of sacrificing his only son Isaac in obedience to Divine Command. True faith, as Wycliffe says, "demonstrates itself in works, and only such a faith brings justification" for us before GOD. ¹³

⁷ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:17.

⁸ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:23.

⁹ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XI, "Of The Justification of Man."

¹⁰ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XI, "Of The Justification of Man."

¹¹ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:21.

¹² 2, KJV, JAMES 2:22.

¹³ 4, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, JAMES 2:22, p 1435.

III. ON ARTICLE XII - OF GOOD WORKS

Article XII of The 39 Articles of Faith is titled, "Of Good Works." Its text is as follows: "Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of GOD's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to GOD in CHRIST, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit."¹⁴

Our good works can not make us righteous before GOD, nor turn away GOD's judgment from the soul that is not justified before Him. For JAMES 1:22 declares, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."¹⁵ If we simply admit into our minds a passive hearing of GOD's Word, we are deceiving ourselves into thinking that this will save us from Divine judgment. Wycliffe observes that "doing must follow hearing, [for] to be a hearer only is a form of self-deception" that will leave our eternal souls forever separated from our Maker!¹⁶

Shall we behold our natural face in a mirror, then go on our way, forgetting that we are sinners and that The Word of GOD commands us to be active doers of righteousness? GOD forbid! If we truly believe GOD's Word in all faith, we shall show forth good works that are "pleasing and acceptable to GOD in CHRIST [that] spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith!"¹⁷ For JAMES 1:25 says, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."¹⁸ Now "as a tree [is] discerned by the fruit [which it bears], a lively Faith may be as evidently known."¹⁹

¹⁴ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XII, "Of Good Works."

¹⁵ 2, KJV, JAMES 1:22.

¹⁶ 4, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, JAMES 1:22, p 1432.

¹⁷ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XII, "Of Good Works."

¹⁸ 2, KJV, JAMES 1:25.

¹⁹ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XII, "Of Good Works."

Do we obey GOD's Word? [JAMES 1:-22-25] ²⁰ Do we bridle our tongue? [JAMES 1:26] ²¹ Do we give active charity to the widow, orphan and poor? [JAMES 1:27;2:5-7&15-16] ²² Do we separate ourselves from the corruption of this world? [JAMES 1:27b] ²³ Do we refrain from giving preference to people based on their outward appearance? [JAMES 2:1-4&9] ²⁴ Do we show brotherly love for our neighbour? [JAMES 2:8] ²⁵ Do we keep the Moral Law as embodied in The Ten Commandments? [JAMES 2:10-12] ²⁶ Do we show mercy? [JAMES 2:13] ²⁷

What does it profit it us if we say we have faith, but lack good works? Such a faith can not save us. For JAMES 2:17 declares, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is

²⁰ 2, KJV, JAMES 1:-22-25 - "But be ye doers of The Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of The Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into The perfect Law of Liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

²¹ 2, KJV, JAMES 1:26 - "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

²² 2, KJV, JAMES 1:27;2:5-7&15-16 - "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction... Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not GOD chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of The Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme That worthy Name by the which ye are called? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

²³ 2, KJV, JAMES 1:27b - "...and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

²⁴ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:1-4&9 - "My brethren, have not The Faith of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, The Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors."

²⁵ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:8 - "If ye fulfil The Royal Law according to The Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:"

²⁶ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:10-12 - "For whosoever shall keep The whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of The Law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by The Law of Liberty."

²⁷ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:13 - "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

dead, being alone!"²⁸ What of the destitute and naked brother or sister that comes to us wanting for even daily food? GOD forbid, if we should see ourselves speaking to those in need – and yet doing nothing – speaking as in JAMES 2:16, "...Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body...!"²⁹

For only the justified man with a living faith coupled with good works declares to us as in JAMES 2:18b, "...I will shew thee my faith by my [good] works!"³⁰ Can we not see that, as Wycliffe comments, "a faith that does not concern itself, by active participation, in the needs of others is not faith at all?"³¹

IV. WHERE JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND GOOD WORKS MEET

So Article XI speaks of men being justified before GOD "only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST by Faith, and not for our own works."³² And Article XII declares that a "lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit [of good works]."³³ In JAMES chapters 4 and 5 we may see justification by faith in our Lord JESUS CHRIST meeting the good works which result.

A lively faith is righteous wisdom from Heaven, while a dead faith is evil foolishness from hell. A dead faith is marked by bitterness, envy and strife [JAMES 3:14-16]³⁴; a cursing and unruly tongue [JAMES 3:8-10]³⁵; constant conflict and warfare [JAMES 4:1-2]³⁶; worldliness [JAMES 4:4]³⁷; lust [JAMES 4:3&5]³⁸;

²⁸ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:17.

²⁹ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:16.

³⁰ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:18b.

³¹ 4, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, JAMES 2:15-17, p 1434

³² 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XI, "Of The Justification of Man."

³³ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XII, "Of Good Works."

³⁴ 2, KJV, JAMES 3:14-16 – "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."

³⁵ 2, KJV, JAMES 3:8-10 – "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we GOD, even The Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of GOD. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

³⁶ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:1-2 – "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not

haughtiness [JAMES 4:13-16] ³⁹; willful sin [JAMES 4:17]. ⁴⁰

Contrast this with a living faith, which is marked by a bridled tongue and godly conversation [JAMES 3:2&13] ⁴¹; a peaceable, gentle, merciful and non-hypocritical soul [JAMES 3:17] ⁴²; peace [JAMES 3:18] ⁴³; a humble soul thankful for GOD's Grace [JAMES 4:6] ⁴⁴; submission and repentance before GOD [JAMES 4:7] ⁴⁵; a pure heart for GOD [JAMES 4:8] ⁴⁶; not judging the souls of other men [JAMES 4:11-12]. ⁴⁷

And just as a faith can be either alive or dead, being marked accordingly, so also are works. Evil works reveal spring forth from a dead faith, while good works spring

hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not."

³⁷ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:4 – "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with GOD? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of GOD."

³⁸ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:3&5 – "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Do ye think that The Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?"

³⁹ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:13-16 – "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If The Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil."

⁴⁰ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:17 – "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

⁴¹ 2, KJV, JAMES 3:2&13 – "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."

⁴² 2, KJV, JAMES 3:17 – "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

⁴³ 2, KJV, JAMES 3:18 – "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

⁴⁴ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:6 – "But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, GOD resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

⁴⁵ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:7 – "Submit yourselves therefore to GOD. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

⁴⁶ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:8 – "Draw nigh to GOD, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded."

⁴⁷ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:11-12 – "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of The Law, and judgeth The Law: but if thou judge The Law, thou art not a doer of The Law, but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, Who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?"

forth from a living faith. Such evil works emanate from a dead faith: love of money [JAMES 5:16] ⁴⁸; oppression of the labourer [JAMES 5:4] ⁴⁹; love of worldly pleasures [JAMES 5:5] ⁵⁰; oppression and murder of the innocent [JAMES 5:6] ⁵¹; hatred against the brethren [JAMES 5:9]. ⁵²

Contrast this with good works which emanate from a living faith: patience in suffering [JAMES 5:7-11] ⁵³; abstaining from vain oaths [JAMES 5:12] ⁵⁴; praying amidst affliction [JAMES 5:13a] ⁵⁵; singing to GOD with joy amidst blessings [JAMES 5:13b] ⁵⁶; praying when sick with Church elders [JAMES 5:14-15] ⁵⁷; confessing to and praying for the brethren [JAMES 5:16a] ⁵⁸; converting the sinner from his sins [JAMES 5:19-20]. ⁵⁹

⁴⁸ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:16 – “ Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

⁴⁹ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:4 – “Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of The Lord of Sabaoth.”

⁵⁰ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:5 – “Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.”

⁵¹ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:6 – “Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.”

⁵² 2, KJV, JAMES 5:9 – “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, The Judge standeth before the door.”

⁵³ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:7-11 – “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of The Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of The Lord draweth nigh... Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in The Name of The Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of The Lord; that The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

⁵⁴ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:12 – “But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.”

⁵⁵ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:13a – “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.”

⁵⁶ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:13b – “Is any merry? let him sing PSALMS.”

⁵⁷ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:14-15 – “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of The Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in The Name of The Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and The Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

⁵⁸ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:16a – “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”

⁵⁹ 2, KJV, JAMES 5:19-20 – “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul

V. IN CLOSING

So let us be warned firstly that faith without works is of no avail for our immortal souls. For JAMES 2:20 declares, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"⁶⁰ True faith is active and alive, resulting in good works. For JAMES 1:22 declares, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."⁶¹ And let us be warned secondly that good works, though being the fruit of a living faith, do not justify us before The LORD. For JAMES 2:23 declares, "And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed GOD, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of GOD!"⁶² Thus we can agree with Article XI of the 39 Articles of Religion when we read, "We are accounted righteous before GOD, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST by Faith, and not for our own works."⁶³

But let us also be assured firstly that GOD will bless those who have a living faith in our Lord JESUS CHRIST that produces as a result good works. For JAMES 1:25 declares, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty [in CHRIST JESUS], and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."⁶⁴ And let us also be assured secondly that GOD accounts us as righteous when we have faith in being justified in our Lord JESUS CHRIST. For JAMES 4:8a,10 says, "Draw nigh to GOD and He will draw nigh to you. Humble yourselves in the sight of The Lord [JESUS CHRIST] and He shall lift you up."⁶⁵

Thus we can agree with Article XII of the 39 Articles of Religion when we read, "'Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins... do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith [in our

from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

⁶⁰ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:20.

⁶¹ 2, KJV, JAMES 1:22.

⁶² 2, KJV, JAMES 2:23.

⁶³ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XI, "Of The Justification of Man."

⁶⁴ 2, KJV, JAMES 1:25.

⁶⁵ 2, KJV, JAMES 4:8a,10.

Lord JESUS CHRIST]... that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known." ⁶⁶ Let us then seek a living faith before GOD The Father, being justified as righteous by our faith in our Lord JESUS CHRIST! And let then our living faith bring forth good works befitting a true Christian faith! For as Saint James declares in JAMES 2:20, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" ⁶⁷ O CHRIST, give us a true and living faith! In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN.

⁶⁶ 1, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XII, "Of Good Works."

⁶⁷ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:20.

VI. REFERENCES

1. "The 39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England."
<http://www.godonthenet.com/lessons/39art.htm>
2. "The Bible, King James Version - Old and New Testaments, with the Apocrypha"
[online]. The Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia.
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/kjv.browse.html#kjvbrowse>
3. "The Scofield Study Bible - The HOLY BIBLE - Containing the Old and New Testaments - Authorized King James Version." Edited by Rev. C. I. Scofield, D.D.. Oxford University Press, New York. 1945.
4. "The Wycliffe Bible Commentary." Edited by Charles F. Pfeiffer & Everett F. Harrison. The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. Moody Press. 3rd printing, 1966.