

Works and Man's Salvation

Introduction:

- 1) Since the Protestant Reformation began almost 500 years ago the role of works in the salvation of man has been hotly debated.
- 2) Some, using **Eph. 2:8f** (and other passages), contend that works have nothing to do with one's salvation.
- 3) Others counter with **Js. 2:20-24** (and others) and say that faith and works are partners.
- 4) Though other things are involved, one of the problems is a failure to define words in their context.
 - a) Illustrated with the word cleave which can have two completely different meanings. It can be "to adhere firmly and closely" or "to divide by or as if by a cutting blow." WCD, p. 213
- 5) I want us to see that while works always carries a connotation of something done, the Scriptures use the term in at least three different ways (though the last two are closely related).
 - a) Works sometimes equates to flawlessness or perfection.
 - b) But also used of the response of faith or conditions demanded as expressions of faith.
 - c) Then works is used to describe the obedient acts of God's children.

I. WORKS OF PERFECTION.

1. Salvation is an undeserved gift (**Eph. 2:8f**) and **Rom. 4:1-8** should help us understand this concept.
 - a. What is being eliminated is the ability to boast (**4:2**) and put God in the position of being a debtor to a man (**4:4**).
 - b. **Vv. 5-8** provide the clear explanation. No one can so work as to be without sin, but must seek an undeserved forgiveness.
2. In **Gal. 3:10f** the point is made that man needed the grace found in Christ because the Law would only justify the one who continued in all things written in the book and no one did that. Cf. **Js. 2:8-11**.
3. The works that cannot save are the works we cannot perform, i.e. works of perfection and merit.
 - a. All have sinned. **Rom. 3:23**
 - b. What do we think we could do to make up for sin? What could we do to impress the Creator and Ruler of the universe?
4. Salvation must come by grace because we simply cannot save ourselves.
 - a. Like Israel by the Red Sea, we must wait on the salvation of the Lord.
5. Fortunately for us, God is gracious and willing to justify the ungodly. **Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:1-7**
6. Grace is God's part and He has done that. Faith is our part and we must supply that.

7. But that raises the question of **Js. 2** and **Heb. 5:8f** and other passages. Is the faith that saves only a belief that God will save or must it respond with some kind of works (deeds, actions, etc.)?
8. Faith cannot respond with perfect works or deeds that allow boasting, but God has always expected faith to respond.

II. WORKS AS CONDITIONS OF FAITH.

A. Illustrated in Heb. 11.

1. Noah was warned and instructed by God's grace, but faith moved him to build. **11:7**
2. God parted the Red Sea, as only God in His grace could do, but faith led the Israelites to go forward. **11:29**
3. Marching didn't bring down the walls of Jericho, only God could do that, but faith marched. **11:30**

B. Explained in James 2.

1. James explains that true faith responds to God's commands with works (actions, deeds). **2:14-26**
2. In **Rom. 4** Paul made the point that Abraham was not justified by works and there meant that he was an imperfect man who had to trust in the forgiveness of God.
3. In **James 2** the same man is used to illustrate that faith must be accompanied by works (actions) to be true faith.

C. Our Salvation Today.

1. It begins with God's mercy, love, and grace. **Eph. 2:4-9**
2. God has done His part in providing the gift of His Son (**Jn. 3:16**) and supplying us with the word of His grace (**Acts 20:32**).
3. But man must respond with faith, a faith that acts. **Mk. 16:16**
 - a. Note that belief and baptism are contrasted with unbelief; the true believer is baptized.
4. This is consistent with many other passages. **Acts 2:38; 8:12; 22:16; Gal. 3:26f**

D. Don't Try to Be Saved By Works.

1. Some want to talk about how good they are, how they are not as bad as some, etc.
2. Others seem to think that if they just "straighten up" they will be saved.
3. By no means, for though faith is expected to repent (**Acts 2:38**), only God's grace can take our guilt away and that means believing on Him who justifies the ungodly. **Rom. 4:5**

4. If you have not done so, please allow yourself to be baptized into Christ today.
 - a. Think of how far that it is from being “of works.”
 - b. You allow someone else to immerse you in water.
 - c. You do nothing that proves your greatness.
 - d. All you do is demonstrate your faith in the God who promises forgiveness.
5. Baptism is not salvation by works, but to argue against baptism is to reject true faith.

III. THE GOOD WORKS EXPECTED OF GOD’S SAVED.

1. No one is saved by perfection, either initially or later in life. Cf. **1 Jn. 1:8—2:2**.
2. But the faith that saves one initially must continue to act in obedience to God and this is demonstrated in **James 2** by Rahab and Abraham.
 - a. Rahab was a Gentile harlot prior to receiving the spies, but Abraham had been serving God for 40 years or so when he offered Isaac.
3. In **1 Jn. 1** those who are cleansed by the blood of Christ are those who seek to walk in the light and avoid sin as best they can. **1 Jn. 1:5-7; 2:1**
4. Having said that we are not saved by works, Paul calls the Christian God’s workmanship and speaks of the good works he must do. **Eph. 2:10**
5. **Eph. 4-6** may not provide a complete summary of all we are to do, but they make a pretty good start.
 - a. Do your part in the body. **4:16**
 - b. Be honest, control your anger, don’t steal, etc. **4:25ff**
 - c. Put away sexual sins. **5:3-5**
 - d. Worship. **5:19**
 - e. Relationships. **5:22—6:9**
6. The God of grace who has saved and continues to save an unworthy people expects us to be zealous of good works. **Titus 2:11-15; 3:1, 8**
7. How are we who were created in Christ Jesus for good works doing?
 - a. Do people note our good works and glorify God? **Mt. 5:16**
 - b. Noted for the kind of good works Dorcas did? **Acts 9:36**
 - c. Making our homes places of good works? **1 Tim. 5:9f**
 - d. Using our incredible prosperity to accomplish good? **1 Tim. 6:17-19**
 - e. Present to encourage these in others? **Heb. 10:24f**

Conclusion:

- 1) Though controversy continues to exist about the role of works, the Bible is not hard to understand on this subject.
- 2) We cannot do perfect or meritorious works to earn salvation.
- 3) But saving faith is a working, obedient faith, both for the obtaining of salvation and the maintaining of salvation.
- 4) If you have not been baptized into Christ you need to do that as an expression of the faith that accesses God's grace.
- 5) If you have done that you must then do the good works God prepared for us, the good works the Scriptures guide us into. **2 Tim. 3:16f**
- 6) Where are you today? What does your faith need to do?