

GRACE VS WORKS

There are differing views on salvation; some believe it is through grace, while others believe it is through works. For some we need to first define what this means. Let's start with the dictionary definitions of these terms.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition (all underline, bold, and italic emphasis in this chapter mine):

Grace: “(1) a: unmerited divine assistance given man for his regeneration or sanctification.”

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary):

Grace: “Favor or kindness shown without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it and in spite of what that same person deserves. Grace is one of the key attributes of God. The Lord God is ‘merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth’. Therefore, grace is almost always associated with mercy, love, compassion, and patience as the source of help and with deliverance from distress.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition:

Work: “(8) pl: performance of moral or religious acts (salvation by ~ s)”

Works: “(1) in process of preparation, development, or completion.”

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary:

“**Works:** Acts or deeds. God's works are praised often in the Book of Psalms and Christ's works are thoroughly discussed in the Gospel of John. Man's works are either good or bad, and these two categories are often mentioned together. Christians are taught to display good works.”

To say a person is saved by grace means this: No one by his own merits or good deeds will ever earn or gain eternal life. In other words, it does not matter how good a person is. They will never make it to heaven on that basis. Rather, we are saved only by God's mercy and His payment for our sins on the cross. Saying a person is saved by works means living a moral life will result in going to heaven after death. This is basically saying that by trying to be obedient to God's laws you have earned the right to be in heaven. Scripture clearly shows that we are saved by grace through faith alone. There are verses that some have stumbled over believing they show we are saved by our works, or good deeds. Therefore, it is important that we consider these verses as well. First, we will show some scripture showing that our salvation is not by works.

Romans 3:28: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."

John 6:28-29: "They said therefore to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'"

Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the **gift** of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Paul says salvation is a gift of God. When you work for something, you receive what is owed to you.

Webster's Dictionary defines a gift as, "something voluntarily transferred from one person to another without compensation".

We receive salvation as a gift from God. There is no way that we can compensate for it! Our righteous acts are like a filthy rag unto the Lord (Isaiah 64:6) by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight (Romans 3:20); and all of us have sinned and fall short of His glory (Romans.3:23). Considering this, how can we possibly be good enough? We can't! That is why Jesus died on the cross for us. We must accept His payment for our sins to be saved. We cannot earn our way to heaven by being "good".

Titus 3:5: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

There are those who try to abuse grace. Some people think they can say a prayer accepting Jesus as Lord and then live however they want. The idea is like buying fire insurance; once you've got it, then it might be okay to play with fire.

This theory is flawed because God can judge our thoughts and intentions (Hebrews 4:12). We are not saved by saying certain words in the form of prayer, we are saved by faith.

In Webster's, one of the definitions of faith is "belief and trust in and loyalty to God"

Those who say they believe in God and claim they said a prayer accepting Jesus as Lord should show some changes in their lives. The Bible tells us even the demons believe there is one God (James 2:19). The demons believe, but they do not trust in, nor are they loyal to, God.

Unfortunately, this also describes many people claiming to be Christians. Granted becoming a Christian does not mean you become perfect, but it does mean there is a change in your life (2 Corinthians 5:17).

A Christian does not become sinless here in this life (I John 1:8-10). Changes that take place in genuine Christians will continue for their entire lives (Philippians 1:6; see also I John 2:4-5, Matthew 7:21-23, Revelation 3:15-16, and Luke 6:44-46).

There were those in the time of the New Testament who also tried to take the attitude we just described. It was this very issue that James addressed:

James 1:22 – 2:26

(Chapter 1) (22) “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

(23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

(24) for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

(25) But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

(26) If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

(27) This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

(Chapter 2) (1) "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

(2) For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes,

(3) and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’

(4) have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

(5) Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

(6) But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

(7) Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

(8) If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well

(9) But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

(10) For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

(11) For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not commit murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

(12) So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

(13) For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

(14) What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

(15) If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

(16) and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

(17) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

(18) But someone may well say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'

(19) You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

(20) But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

(21) Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

(22) You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

(23) and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God.

(24) You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.

(25) And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

(26) For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

People who say we are saved by works will generally focus on the part of this passage that is in **bold lettering** in verses 2:21-26. Take another look at 1:22; James declares that those who do not live their faith are deceiving themselves. Then again in 1:26 he uses the person’s words as an example. James says if they do not control what they say their religion is worthless. Jesus himself said that a person’s words show what is in his heart (Luke 6:45, Matthew 12:34). In James 1:27, James defines true religion as one that has action taking care of those in need and living a godly life. In 2:1 he is dealing with attitudes which are another matter of the heart — just as Jesus said, “for the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart”. James is saying that our actions also show that which fills our hearts.

The point James is making is this: if you have genuine faith, then your heart is right with the Lord, and it should show in your life. Those who think they are saved by works should take a good look at 2:9-10; according to James, one sin makes you guilty of all. Considering that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) this paints a grim picture.

In 2:14, James asks a very important question: "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" The answer to this question is no! As James goes on to show, faith without works is dead. In other words, if you have genuine faith, you produce fruit. The illustration James used shows that Abraham had genuine faith. This is shown in his obedience to do as the Lord said. In 2:23 James says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness". His righteousness came from belief. Abraham's belief resulted in obedience.

To say a person is saved by works is like putting the cart before the horse; it just doesn't work. Sheep don't say "baaa baaa" to become sheep. They say "baaa baaa" because they are sheep. We as Christians do not do good works so that we can be saved. We do good works because we are saved.

Paul illustrated with Abraham that salvation is not through works. Romans 4:1-5: "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness"

Some have said we are saved by faith to begin with when we first accept the Lord. Then after this point we are justified by our actions. This is irrational thinking. The Bible tells us that Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3) and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7) Now I ask you how many sins had you committed when Christ died for them 2,000 years ago? None of them, right? They were all in the future. Which sins does the blood of Christ cover?

The Bible says ALL sin. Given that all of our sins were atoned for on the cross prior to our birth, how can we now, after accepting the Lord, be justified by our works?

Paul also addressed this issue.

Galatians 2:20-3:3: **(20)**"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.**(21)**"I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."**(Ch.3vs.1)**You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? **(2)**This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? **(3)** Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

(See also Galatians.5:1-6.)

Paul here is very clear that we are saved by grace. He even states that if this were not so, then Christ died for nothing. He considered the idea that we are perfected by works (after receiving the Lord) foolishness. Following is another statement Paul made that some people misunderstand, thinking we are saved by works. While reading it keep in mind what he said here in Galatians chapters 2 and 3.

Consider Philippians 2:12: "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

Is Paul contradicting himself here? No not at all we read the following in this same letter.

Philippians 1:6 "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus"

Philippians 1:27-29. "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents — which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake"

There are a couple of ways to view this, and I believe both are correct and applicable to the context. First, Paul declared in this letter that the Lord is the one who began this good work. He then admonished the Philippians to conduct themselves in a worthy manner, just as we saw James write in his letter. By Paul saying, “work out your own salvation”, he was encouraging the Philippians to live in a manner worthy of their salvation. It is important that you recognize and make this distinction: he said, "work out your salvation" Paul did not say "work *for* your salvation".

Perhaps this illustration will make this concept easier to understand: You have a body, and when you exercise your body, it is called a “workout”. You are *working out* your body. When you are already saved and you continue to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, you are *working out* your salvation. You are not *working for* your salvation.

The second viewpoint is that since salvation also means deliverance, Paul was telling the Philippians through Christ to work through their hardships. When the Philippian church stood firm in one spirit, it was a sign of destruction to their opponents. It was also a sign that they were saved. This is the same thing James was saying in his letter — works were the sign that they were saved. It was important that they stood firm even in hard times. As Paul said, they were “granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”.

We are saved by faith, not works. But good works should be very important to the true believer. Remember what Jesus said: "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Here are some related scriptural references that show we are saved by grace, not works: Genesis 15:6, Matthew 19:23-29, Luke 7:49-50, Luke 8:11-15, Acts 15:8-11, Acts 16:30-31, Romans 3:19-28, Romans 4:4-5, Romans 8:8, Romans 10:9, Romans 10:13, and Romans 11:6.

Writings from church leaders in the first couple of centuries are not Scripture. They are, however, helpful in determining if the Church has changed any major doctrine or the interpretation of Scripture.

The following quotes can be found in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*: Vol. 1, Polycarp, c.69-c.155, bishop of Smyrna (**vol.1 PDF pg.24**)

The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, Chapters 1 and 2:
Our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] ‘whom God raised froth the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave.’ In whom, though now ye see Him not, ye believe, and believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; into which joy many desire to enter, knowing that ‘by grace ye are saved, not of works,’ but by the will of God through Jesus Christ. ‘Wherefore, girding up your loins,’ ‘serve the Lord in fear’ and truth, as those who have forsaken the vain, empty talk and error of the multitude, and

‘believed in Him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and gave Him glory,’ and a throne at His right hand. To Him all things in heaven and on earth are subject.”

Vol. 1, Clement I, d. AD 101, called Clement of Rome; the bishop of Rome, c.92 to 101

The 1st Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Chapter XXXII: **(vol 1 PDF pg.9)**

And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Vol. 8, The 1st Epistle of the Blessed Clement, the disciple of Peter, Chapter II: **(Vol. 8 PDF pg. 125)**

For not by eloquence or renown, by station and descent, or by beauty or strength, or by length of life, is the kingdom of heaven obtained; but it is obtained by the power of faith, when a man exhibits the works of faith. For whosoever is truly righteous, his works testify concerning his faith, that he is truly a believer, with a faith which is great, a faith which is perfect, a faith which is in God, a faith which shines in good works, that the Father of all may be glorified through Christ.”

Clement of Alexandria c. 150-c.215, Greek Theologian
Vol. 2, The Stromata, or Miscellanies, Book 1, Chapter VII:
(vol 1 PDF pg. 275)

And now we must look also at this, that if ever those who know not how to do well, live well; for they have lighted on well-doing. Some, too, have aimed well at the word of truth through understanding. ‘But Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith.’ It is therefore of no advantage to them after the end of life, even if they do good works now, if they have not faith.

Wherefore also the Scriptures were translated into the language of the Greeks, in order that they might never be able to allege the excuse of ignorance...”