

GOOD NEWS
for the unsaved
WORLD!

(#184)
Works and salvation.

1

LAST TIME, we saw that Scripture teaches:

- Good works *do not* save a person.
- Saved people have an *obligation* to do good works. (Actually, *unsaved* people *also* have this obligation, though they ignore it.)
- Claiming to be saved, yet living *without* good works is a contradiction.

★ *Anybody who is willing to read what the New Testament says will see these things ... IF they don't deliberately skip over the verses they don't want to accept, or "reinterpret" them.* ★

In spite of this fact... Today, many church-goers take offense at anything that even *hints* at the *obligation** to do good works.

↳ Yet if they were willing even to look at the *context* of the verses they *do* like (half-truths, because of what they ignore), they would discover these things!

* (In salvation, values change; so "obligation" becomes "desire.")

2

The Bible study method used last week:

1. Accepting the **words** – what they mean and how they relate to each other.
2. Paying attention to the **context**.
3. Looking at **cross-references**, which take us to other passages that have a similar focus.

THIS CAN BE EASILY DONE WITH JUST ABOUT ANY BIBLE THAT HAS CROSS-REFERENCES IN THE MARGINS.*

- Today, there are so many Bible study helps available – many being public domain and low-cost, or even free (online) – that *we will have no excuse at the day of judgment.*
- To speed up our research, we used "The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge," which is a book filled with cross-references for the entire Bible. It's low cost (as a book) or even free (online).

* (You can also accomplish it by simply reading the New Testament.)

3

YOU CHOSE TO NOT KNOW.

YOU CHOSE TO CONSIDER OTHER THINGS MORE IMPORTANT

BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THE BIBLE SAID!

YOU CHOSE TO NOT TAKE THE TIME TO FIND OUT WHAT THE BIBLE SAID.

THEREFORE:

'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!'
Matthew 25:41b (CSB)

4

TODAY, we will begin a more in-depth look at this issue.

- Since this topic is a "heaven-or-hell" matter, we want to make sure that we *know clearly* what the Bible says.

★ *Anybody who is willing to pay attention to what the New Testament says will see these things – IF they don't skip over the verses they don't want to accept.* ★

OUR BIBLE STUDY TECHNIQUE?

- The same as before; but we will use a Bible *concordance* to find verses on the topic. A concordance lists all the words in the Bible in alphabetical order, and shows us the verses where they are found. Some concordances are available at low cost (book) or even free (online).
- Our starting point will be passages that use the words "work(s)" or "deed(s)" – though we will include other relevant passages, as appropriate.

5

SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS:

- In the New Testament, there are about 200 verses with these words. Most are relevant to our study. (A few occur in an unrelated context.)
- At a quick glance, the relevant verses fit into the following categories (numbers rounded off):
 - ✓ **God's works** (and related issues) ~ 4 dozen verses.
 - ✓ **Salvation and works** (how these concepts relate) ~ 3 dozen verses.
 - ✓ **General statements** about works ~ 2 dozen verses (most focusing on future judgment issues).
 - ✓ **Evil works** (i.e., what the *unsaved* do) ~ 3½ dozen verses.
 - ✓ **Good works** (i.e., what the *saved* do) ~ 4 dozen verses.

★ There are so many passages that affirm the Bible message, that the only way to reach a *different* conclusion is to reject the Bible, and choose to lie. Doing this is a *moral* issue, not a *fact* issue. ★

6

WORKS AND WHAT GOD DOES IN OUR SALVATION.

- We have looked at this issue before. The world views sovereignty and responsibility as being in conflict. The Bible describes sovereignty and responsibility as working together (but in separate realms).
- Here, we focus on God's role, as Creator. We cannot experience what God does on this level. We can only be told about it in Scripture, or learn about it (perhaps imperfectly) as we look back in history.
- Logically, what God does (sovereignty) comes first. But chronologically (in our human experience), it does not in any way interfere with, or hinder our choices – which occur on the created level.
- (God also interacts with us on the created level, through Jesus Christ.)

When God reveals these things, it's not to interfere with our choices. Rather, it's to encourage those who follow him, and to warn those who don't. It's to tell us that our choices matter.

7

Salvation is by God's GRACE – not by our works.

- What God does in saving us is NOT determined by OUR works.
- On the human level, salvation involves faith; but ultimately, we are saved because of what God does (= grace), not by what we do.

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (CSB)

See also: 2 Timothy 1:9 (= because of his own purpose and grace) and Titus 3:5 (= because of his mercy).

- Working for salvation is a contradiction to receiving it by grace.

Now if by grace, then it is not by works; otherwise grace ceases to be grace.

Romans 11:6 (CSB)

8

Even the "work" of faith is a gift from God!

- The Jews asked Jesus what "works" they could do, in order to be saved. His response was that the only "work" people can do is to trust him and what he did. (He did the actual work.)

"What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

John 6:28b-29 (NIV)

- Yet even then, once we learn about God's role in salvation, we discover that our faith was actually a gift, received from God!

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (CSB)

Simeon Peter, [writing]: To those who have received a faith equal to ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:1 (CSB)

9

"WORKS" and "GRACE" never "work together" to save a person.

- There is a connection between the two, but not in the sense of working together to cause salvation. Salvation is not a joint effort between God and humans!
- Because of God's grace, we are saved by the gift of faith, not by works – as we saw in Ephesians 2:8-9. But Scripture doesn't stop there. If we keep reading, we discover that God not only enables our faith. He also enables our works!

For we are his workmanship, ...

Ephesians 2:10a (CSB)

"Workmanship"? The following translation explains what it means... along with God's purpose for doing it:

God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us new people so that we would spend our lives doing the good things he had already planned for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10 (ERV)

10

FAITH and WORKS are both made possible by GRACE!

Spiritually dead people do not come alive without GRACE.

- An unsaved person is dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1) and a slave to sin (John 8:34; Romans 6:16). There is no heart desire to trust God or to obey him.
- On our own, we would have continued to willfully choose to go our own way – perhaps wanting to "go to heaven" (to escape hell), but not wanting to submit to God and follow Jesus.

WRITTEN TO PEOPLE WHO ARE NOW SAVED:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins ...
[All of us, according to v. 3] ... But God ... made us alive ...

Ephesians 2:1a, 4a, 5a (CSB)

... though you once were slaves to sin, ...
You have been set free from sin ...

Romans 6:17b, 18a (BSB)

11

Why we CAN change:

- When we do exercise repentance and faith, and we do have works, it is because of GRACE.
- Initially, we might not realize the role of GRACE in our salvation (because we are focusing on what we need to do, in order to be saved – similar to what we see in Acts 16:30). Yet as we grow in understanding salvation, we grow in understanding GRACE.
- And so, we give God credit for ALL of these: our repentance, our faith, and even our works. We come to the realization that we would have NEVER made those choices, or even wanted to make them, if it weren't for GRACE.
- This GRACE-caused change is all-encompassing, affecting even how we live – our "works."

For the grace of God ... teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives ...

Titus 2:11a, 12a (NIV)

12

God's GRACE completely changes us.

- The change is so great, that God describes it as a "new creation."

For we are his workmanship, **created** in Christ Jesus for good works ...

Ephesians 2:10a (CSB)

... what counts is **the new creation**.

Galatians 6:15b (NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is **a new creation**; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 5:17 (CSB)

... **the new self, created to be like God** in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:24b (NIV)

... **the new self**, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Colossians 3:10b (NIV)

13

"WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL 'NEW'?"

We may have questions, because of the imperfections we continue to have. Those questions may need answered... **but we don't do so by changing the message that these verses teach!**

- Feelings vary; God doesn't. We can admit our imperfection and rely on God to work in our lives (hearts and minds) to *change* us. (We also have an obligation to pursue this change, as seen in Romans 12:2.)
- As long as we live in these weak, sin-influenced bodies, we will have reason to be dissatisfied. Use your *dissatisfaction* to drive you to God, who is in the process of changing you!
- Being *satisfied* is often more dangerous! It can lead to complacency.
- An honest awareness of our weakness and of God's greatness can lead to humility, as well as to trust and reliance on God.

14

"WORKS" AND WHAT WE DO IN OUR SALVATION.

- The New Testament has hundreds of verses describing the role of **faith** in salvation – and this includes verses that explain the relationship between works, faith and salvation.



How do works, faith and salvation interact?

- In some passages, they are in *conflict*; in others, they *work together*.
- To understand the specific relationships between these concepts, we need to look at the passages themselves, *without using out-of-context passages to "undo" what they say*. (The words used, how they relate to each other, and the immediate context, will prove most valuable in understanding these verses.)

15

The "WORKS of the Law" cannot save.

- If ANYONE could have been saved by their own works, it would have been the Jews. They had *more* revelation from God than did the Gentiles; for they had *God's actual revealed Words*.

So what advantage does the Jew have? ... First, they were entrusted with the very words of God.

Romans 3:1a, 2b (CSB)

- This revelation from God showed them *more clearly* the difference between good and evil. It also showed them their need to *trust* God for the heart changes they could not achieve by their own efforts.
- Even so, most of Israel's history is one of NOT trusting God – even after God did so much for them.

But even after all he did, you refused to trust the LORD your God, ...

Deuteronomy 1:32 (NLT); see also Deuteronomy 9:23b.

16

Israel's example shows us what happens if we rely on works.

- Most Jews were content to perform religious activities, as though that was sufficient to *earn* God's favor and righteousness. (Love and obedience were low priorities for them.) God warned them that *there is a difference* between obeying God and performing religious activities.

To obey is better than sacrifice ...

1 Sa 15:22b (NIV)

- In Jesus' and Paul's day, many of the Jews attempted to follow the various regulations of the Law. But in all their attempts, their trust was in their own actions, not in God. *Thus, they did NOT attain righteousness!*

... the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because **they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.**

Romans 9:31-32a (NIV)

17

Even ONE sin will result in eternal condemnation.

- Like people today, the Jews failed to understand the seriousness of even *one* sin.
- The Law requires 100% *lifetime* obedience – and only *Jesus* did this. Even *one* violation would leave you eternally cursed.

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

Galatians 3:10 (NIV)

- Since we have *all* sinned (Romans 3:23), *none* of us can be justified (declared righteous) by means of the works of the Law... but only by trusting Jesus and what *he* accomplished.

[We] know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:16a (NIV)

18

Trusting Jesus is our only option.

- These facts leave us with *only one option*: trusting Jesus.

Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "**the righteous will live by faith.**"

Galatians 3:11 (NIV)

(This "works of the law" concept is mentioned in a few other passages (such as in Romans, in chapters 3 and 4); but the message is *always* the same. Trying to get saved by "doing what the Bible says" doesn't work!)

- ✓ As we've seen in the past, our sin is just too sinful. Any attempt to earn salvation would be merely an expression of what the "flesh" (or "sinful nature") could do. *We need the Spirit FIRST* – and receiving the Spirit occurs *at the point of salvation*.
- ✓ Consider Paul's testimony (Philippians 3:4-14). If anyone could have succeeded in working for salvation, he could have – and *he failed!*

19

Even so, there is some type of connection between salvation and works.

James tells us this very clearly.

- This issue is described in James 2:14-26.
- If we were to deny this passage (or "reinterpret" it, based on what we want to believe), we would be deliberately lying about this passage!
- So, rather than denying it, we should try to understand it. After all, *it is not safe to lie about what God says.*

Some preliminary comments:

- James is NOT focused on "works for salvation"; but rather, on "how saving faith operates."
- He tells us that works are a part of saving faith.

★ There is so much for us to examine on this issue, that we will have to look at it next time! ★

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OUR MISSION

Let us pursue an *accurate* understanding of Scripture, making it our goal to **NOT** change what it says!

Doing this will influence our thoughts, our conduct, and our eternity.

People often "interpret" the verses they *don't* like "in the light of" the verses they *do* like.

There is value in seeing what other passages say, but *not for CHANGING the message of the verses we don't like – especially when the message of those verses is repeated in multiple places in the Bible!* (If it was just one passage with that focus, perhaps it could be a "misinterpretation"; but when there are many passages with that same focus (even if mentioned in different ways), it is a "theme.")

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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