

Works, Works, Works

Is a person saved by faith, or by faith and works? Are good works necessary in salvation? These crucial questions are most clearly answered in Ephesians 2:8-10:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

There are three important truths to note in this passage.

1. Not of Works

Salvation is ‘not your own doing ... not the result of works’. The Bible excludes our participation or contribution in salvation. Salvation is not the payment for our efforts and good deeds. This is hard for human pride to accept. We would like to think that we’re not that bad or that helpless. We would readily admit that we need God’s assistance, but we can help ourselves too – or so we vainly imagine. Spiritually speaking, we were ‘dead in trespasses and sins’. Cadavers don’t help themselves; they do nothing but rot and decay. We are in need of God’s supernatural power and grace to breath in us new spiritual life and save us from our desperate plight.

2. His Workmanship

Indeed that is the note of celebration in this scripture. ‘For we are his workmanship!’ The salvation of sinners is a work greater than the creation of the entire universe. And that work was done by God, not us, through Jesus Christ his Son. He humbled himself and became man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross, was risen and exalted to the heavens to secure the salvation of his people. That is why salvation is not *our* work - it is the work of another, God!

3. For Good Works

Not that good works are unnecessary or optional in the life of the saved! On the contrary, God liberates the slaves of sin so that they might freely live for him. First the Bible says, ‘not of works’, and immediately afterwards, it concludes that we’re saved ‘for good works’. In other words, works are not the cause but the result of salvation. That is God’s eternal purpose. He prepared beforehand, even before they were actually saved, the good works that the redeemed should do. Nor are good deeds an occasional thing for Christians; they are called to ‘walk in them’ – daily abounding in righteous, kind, good and merciful deeds.

What about me?

Two kinds of people claim to believe in Christ, but who are not really saved at all.

The first is the religious person who, in addition to faith in Christ, seeks to do good deeds to merit salvation. Such works are the negation of faith in Christ. In practice his works say, ‘I don’t trust in Christ completely, I must add something more myself!’

Equally deceived is the person who claims that he has faith while his life is devoid of good works, unchanged, and still entangled in sin. The lack of works is the evidence of the absence of faith, no matter how loudly he protests. His barren and dead faith will damn him to hell.

For salvation, come to Christ empty-handed, leaving all your works behind, bringing all your sin and shame, and by faith clutch onto the cross of Christ! He gives you freedom and life, and from thereon, do not cease from constantly doing good works in obedience and gratitude to our wonderful Saviour.