

Are Works Part of Our Salvation?

False-grace adherents, Universalists and the millions who subscribe to the doctrine of eternal security (once saved, always saved) arrive at their related positions via a theological journey that takes them all right through Ephesians 2:8-9.

They have been so inoculated by this belief system that anybody who suggests that faith is not enough, or that works play a part in salvation, must be following another Jesus and subscribing to another gospel.

Antinomianism is often the result for those who reject works in relationship to salvation. Antinomianism states that God forgives sins fully, and sinning has no disadvantage. Additionally, obedience has no impact. If it did, it would taint what Jesus did at Calvary.

Regarding Antinomianism, Steve Hill wrote:

Purveyors of this poisonous teaching fail to realize that Jesus calls us beyond the requirements of the law in His teaching, stating, for example, that adultery refers to adultery of the heart and not just the physical act (Matt. 5:27-28).

This, folks, is an eternally destructive theology: “What does it profit, my brothers, if a man says he has faith but has no works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14).

The question is answered several verses later: “You see then how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).

In order for that verse to register rightly, we’ll have to

talk about the difference between our own works and works that are graced and mandated by God. There is much more to the salvation equation than simply exhibiting faith.

The idea that all we have to do is believe in faith to gain salvation leads many to believe that all is well after we profess that faith. We are forever secure, no matter how we live.

The manifestation of that belief is destructive in many ways on many levels. Just yesterday, someone quite adamantly told me that Hitler most definitely could have been saved. They also said that Hillary Clinton's recent comments about possibly entering the ministry and preaching as a United Methodist should be celebrated. Since she believed on Christ long ago, she should be affirmed in her pursuit, no matter what abominable fruit she may produce.

Where did the basis of the argument come from? A misunderstanding of salvation, of faith and of works of righteousness. Many professing Christians simply are not saved. Some were at one point, and their unrighteous decisions cost them their relationship with Christ.

What Kind of Works Are Necessary?

A lot of people get tripped up when considering works as a part of our salvation process. Many have flashbacks to Catholic penance, where repetitively reciting the rosary is the prescribed answer to their sin. This, friend, is not the type of works that we should be endeavoring to accomplish. In no way should we attempt to trade work for an eternal paycheck.

Let's look at a passage of Scripture:

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the

washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4).

This is a solid, clear truth. Our own righteousness is a non-player. Works that come from our own righteousness are fruitless. Jesus alone could atone for our sins and make it possible for us to be in relationship with God. Jesus alone could make a way for us to spend eternity with him. So, on the front end, we don't have anything of worth to offer.

As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one (Rom. 3:10).

"You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, those who remember You in Your ways. Indeed, You were angry, for we had sinned; in our sins we remained a long time, and shall we be saved? But we all are as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness is as filthy rags; and we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Is. 64:5-6).

Understand, our own attempts to atone for our own filthiness is futile. It's laughable. We deserve hell and we are absolutely helpless outside of Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross.

But, works of another type absolutely do play a role in our salvation. Obedience and a right response to be holy is critical. If we don't play our part, our salvation was either never secure, or it can be surrendered.

Above, in Titus 3, it was made clear that our righteousness and our works were powerless in regard to salvation. However, the message continues:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you constantly to affirm, so that those who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to everyone (Titus 3:8).

True faith must manifest works that are not empowered by our own ability, but rather graced by God himself.

Let's look at Ephesians 2:8-9 a little more closely:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one should boast.

“For by grace you have been saved ...”

Another way to say it would be, “God, through divine favor and influence, has empowered you to be made whole.”

Since it's impossible for us, in our humanness, to work the miracle of salvation, to bridge that uncrossable chasm, no matter how hard we work at it, God granted the power necessary—through faith.

You could reword this by saying, “by being convicted and convinced of truth, and becoming reliant upon Christ...”

Faith is a loaded word. We know that even demons believe. They are convinced that Jesus is Lord, but their reaction is very different. If simple belief was all that was necessary for salvation, we'd be living in our heavenly mansions next door to demons of every stench. Of course, that will not happen, so just what defines faith? Our response. Our obedience. Our works. I don't believe works that are empowered by God's grace are simply an “expected outcome” for one who comes to Jesus. (Have you ever met someone who “got saved” and still struggles with obedience?) I believe they are an integral, strategic part of the salvation process.

God's grace and our response are both key.

And, yes, I'll agree to a point that you are probably thinking about right now. Consecration takes time. However, I believe a repeated failure at consecration can threaten our justification. We can't take God's calls to obedience and works lightly. Faith is not enough.

"and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God ..."

God initiated the relationship. He did what we could not do. Our wretchedness wouldn't keep him away, and our righteousness wouldn't draw him near. God recognized that we all had hit rock-bottom as we realized we had no power whatsoever to save ourselves. His love required that he simply rescue us by offering a relationship with him, and we didn't have to pay for it, work for it or convince him we were worthy. We could never be.

Our humility is required as we allow God to move in and take over. Outside of Christ there is no grace to live in obedience so the only option was for God's gift to be given.

"not of works, so that no one should boast."

God knew any hope of relationship with him would be compromised if we ever thought we could find salvation through our own effort. Our pride would take over and we'd boast about our remarkable abilities to find eternal life outside of God.

Here's how this works: We can't say, "Thanks God, but no thanks. I really don't want to subscribe to your methods, protocols or mandates. I want to do this on my own terms, so I'm going to give one million dollars to charity. I'll also do good, be good and think good thoughts. I'll pay my own way. See you in heaven someday (But don't bother me too much. I'll be busy doing my own thing there too.)"

We need God. Period. So, we are graced when we truly believe to be in relationship with Jesus and adopt his way of life. We cannot simply have faith and then live according to our own plans. Works are not simply an evidence of faith, they are a key part of the salvation process. What trips people up so often is a misunderstanding of our own works versus works that are graced by God to fulfill. When God gives us power to respond, we must respond.

In order for this article to be written, I need the free power that the laptop receives by being plugged into the outlet in the coffee shop. I couldn't type this out without the gift of electricity. Because of that grace, I can now get to work. God will anoint me, inspire me, grace me and empower me to write, but he won't write it for me.

Our Works Are Fruitless, But Works Inspired by God's Grace Are Mandated

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Immediately after our human works were deemed to have no value in regard to our salvation, the very next verse highlights a primary purpose of our salvation—good works that we must walk in. Again, works are not an automatic result of salvation, nor are they disconnected from salvation. Works are mandated, and God gives us the grace to those who are saved to fulfill them.

God absolutely will grace us to obey, but we must be the ones to respond. If we live a life of disobedience to God, a life devoid of works, the salvation that we freely received via faith will quickly be surrendered.

We have been given a gift that's much greater than spending eternity in heaven (and not in hell). God's grace enables us to work miracles! We can be full of supernatural joy and life

every day. The works we now can do could never be done in the Old Covenant. Jesus made it possible to work wonders.

Yes, I believe calls to obedience and work that are fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit do impact our salvation, but they also launch us into a phenomenal, remarkable, other-worldly life!

We absolutely can live free from sin. If we do sin (not when), we have access to Jesus and the same grace that we discovered when we initially gave our lives to him.

Let's be sober regarding the issue of grace, faith and works, but also exuberant. Jesus has made it possible to live the most amazing life—now, and forever with him in eternity.