

# What's WORKS Got to DO with it?

***Despite this title's poorly worded English, this Paper considers the Question that seems to Provoke such an Averse Reaction among Evangelicals. Does their position Against our Doing ANY Works reflect a Correct Understanding?***

© Rich Traver, 81520-1411, 5-26-09 [ 151 ] [www.goldensheaves.org](http://www.goldensheaves.org)

A televangelist on the west coast accepts questions called-in from viewers. On a recent telecast he responded to a question that involved what regard we as Christians ought to have toward doing what are called 'works'. His response to the questioner's premise was quick and unequivocal. Since in his words, "Christ has done it all for you", there are no works involved in salvation. We mustn't regard our doing any works as having any value toward the attainment of salvation. In fact, as he worded his response to the question, he affirmed that any works we might consider doing would pose an offence against the auspices of grace.

His instantly passionate attitude against any performance of works, or toward our works having any contributive relevance to the attainment of salvation was rather startling. It reflected the sentiment of another representative ministry based in the Pacific Northwest, *the Berean Call*, who take a similar position in regard to the question of how works factor into the situation. (This isn't a unique position among staunch evangelicals.) In one of their booklets, titled "*The Nonnegotiable Gospel*", we find this same position expressed. Here are some quotes from their booklet:

*"The gospel is all about what Christ has done. It says nothing about what Christ must yet do, because the work of our redemption is finished."*

*"To combat 'the gospel of the grace of God', the great deceiver has many false gospels, but they all have two subtle **rejections of grace** in common: ritual and/or self-effort. Ritual makes redemption an ongoing process performed by a special priesthood; and self-effort gives man a part to play in earning his salvation."*

*"...If man is to come to God, it must be solely by His grace and His provision, not by any human work. On the other hand, we see man's flagrant repudiation of God's prohibition against self-*

*effort, and his arrogant attempt to build a tower that would enable him to climb by steps of his own making into heaven itself....*

*There must be no illusion that man could contribute anything by his own efforts to his salvation."*

Of course, the platform scripture for their position is Ephesians 2:8&9. Well known among informed Christians, it reads: "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*" This seems to say it all and say it well!

But, it's verse 10 that so many avoid. It might be more understandable if it were found elsewhere, but being the very next verse, and actually being the rest of the sentence, it's one that shouldn't be bypassed. It continues: "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*" Not only are works involved (though not as the means of attaining salvation) they are the objective of it! We are His workmanship, which indicates the 'works' we are created to perform are those which He performs in and through us! And, not just any good new ideas, but those specific works which were before ordained to be our walk of life! At the time Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians was written, what were those 'before ordained' works? Most logically, the Laws of God with their statutes and judgments as they have application to modern life.

(It should be clearly pointed out here that this is not advocating any form of salvation BY works, but rather a salvation UNTO good works, which is the seeming 'problem area' in the modern evangelical community. People oriented to that persuasion are pre-programmed to immediately draw that conclusion. There's a cognitive disconnect with

the idea of a salvation that **produces** works. They can only conceive of works as being an attempt at earning it, which works can not do.)

### A Conclusion Beyond Reason

I think in all fairness, we understand what their position attempts to achieve, but with it, and especially in the minds of those with lesser understanding, there's a danger in that message. Increasingly, as the religious population becomes theologically 'dumbed-down', the message is taken to mean what it originally was never intended to mean. And this is true of the teachers as well as their congregations. Even the evangelical ministry is lulled by their own message. What was originally intended to discourage any notion that salvation could in any way be 'earned', the message that folks draw from their nominally correct assertion was over-applied, turning worshippers against the very code of conduct that is the objective of the New Covenant. (Having the law implanted in ones' mind and heart. (Heb. 8:10)) In so doing, they became the prime advocates of antinomianism, generating a contempt for the Laws of God out of all proportion to common sense!

### Not Necessary Morphed into Wrong!

Where originally the intent was to discourage anyone from expecting that the Law could be used as a means of attaining salvation, which it can't possibly deliver, the position was ramped-up to a level where it was declared 'wrong' to have or do any works at all. Especially our keeping those Old Testament Commandments! What began as a 'we need not' gradually morphed into 'we must not'! We **must not** be found keeping any Old Testament Laws, as that would be an offense against God's Grace by which we are saved. As a degree of the liberal movement crept into bible colleges, this was the transformation that took place. But, not without re-defining grace, and in the process, removing all appropriate response from the auspices of faith through which we access grace. James' pointed co-dependency of works and faith in his Chapter 2 is the bane of such teachers. James' position is not contradictory to other New Testament writings, but is at serious odds with theirs. Just for example, he wrote in 2:14: "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not*

*works? can faith save him?... 17: Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18: Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works... 20: But wilt thou know, O vain man, that **faith without works is dead?** 21: Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22: Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?.. 24: Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only... 26: For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*

James presents works as a component of the justification process. The question James leaves us with is, do those who discourage works promote a dead faith? Not works as a means of earning salvation, but an appropriate response to having been given it.

Let's review those four published statements given above in the light of scriptures.

### Redemption is All Finished

1). "*The gospel is all about what Christ has done. It says nothing about what Christ must yet do, because the work of our redemption is finished.*"

What Christ has done is to pay the penalty for our sins. The presumption in that is that our being completely forgiven is all there is to it. But as Romans 5:10 explains, "*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*" Being forgiven of our sins, of and by itself, is not full salvation. It is merely reconciliation, which allows us access to the transforming power of Christ's Life, which He must live in us. Notice, with reconciliation being spoken of in the past tense, it presents salvation in a future tense! The two are not fully accomplished together at the same time. We are not effectively 'saved' with or by forgiveness alone. That's the sense of being "*His workmanship*" that we read of in Ephesians 2:10. Being rid of our guilty past is only **one part of the process**, and yes, it is a process. We must thereafter inculcate the sinless nature of our Savior in order to become the

converted being we are called to be. (This is one of the lessons evident in the Days of Unleavened Bread) Conversion is not just an 'identity thing', it is a change of our core nature. We are called upon to imitate Christ's living example. *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:"* (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:21-22) Some, it seems, would regard that as a 'works formula' and reject the premise.

### Deceived into Obedience?

2). *"To combat 'the gospel of the grace of God', the great deceiver has many false gospels, but they all have two subtle **rejections of grace** in common: ritual and/or self-effort. Ritual makes redemption an ongoing process performed by a special priesthood; and self-effort gives man a part to play in earning his salvation."*

It would be interesting to know what the writer here would regard as 'ritual'. Self-effort is self-evident. But it's the 'rejection of grace' idea that's especially corrosive of good sense. It functions to intimidate. No one would want to be regarded as rejecting grace. The problem is, grace has been re-defined into something it never was intended to be. Grace is something we're admonished to 'grow in', which confounds the modern definition.

It would be a very curious statement that we're to *"work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Philippians 2:12) if our salvation was complete and finalized at the very onset of our accepting Christ and being forgiven of our sins.

The Apostle Peter weighs in with a most interesting expression in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:10, in which he refers to the manifold (many-faceted, or many and varied aspects of the) grace of God. Again, we can see clear evidence that God's grace involves many other facets than just forgiveness of sins. In the context of Peter's expression, we can see examples of some of those many facets: Having the same suffering-capable mind as Christ (v.1), a capability to cease from sin (v.1), able to resist the pulls of the flesh (v.2) such as: licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, reveling, binges, idolatries, (v.3), able to live the will of God (v.2), able to bear man's contempt for resisting the natural pulls (v.6),

and to live according to God in the Spirit (v.6), fervent in love (v.8), having genuine hospitality (v.9), able to speak God's Word under inspiration (v.11), serving with God-supplied ability (v.11), tolerant in fiery trials (v.12), rejoicing while enduring sufferings as a Christian (v.13)

Then in verse 17 he goes on to say, *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"*

Not only is the endued Grace of God multi-faceted, but we're evaluated on what we allow it to produce in our personal character! Judgment now is upon the 'house of God', (Evaluation, not condemnation) based on our obedience! The rest of that statement above suggests that there is a distinct difference seen in the grace recipient as opposed to those who have not truly received it and as a result don't "obey"! (They still being Romans 8:7 types!)

(I excerpt the above three paragraphs from a more comprehensive study under the title *"Growing in Grace"*. Be sure to request a free copy.) Modern religion has long labored under an inadequate definition of what grace really is and what it obligates us to! Under grace, we are forbidden to sin. Such well-known scriptures as Romans 6:1-2 clearly establish that we are to cease from sin, which 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:4 defines as transgressing the law.

### Growing in Grace?

3). *"...If man is to come to God, it must be solely by His grace and His provision, not by any human work. On the other hand, we see man's flagrant repudiation of God's prohibition against self-effort, and his arrogant attempt to build a tower that would enable him to climb by steps of his own making into heaven itself..."* Does God in fact prohibit self-effort on the part of those He has called? That's what they allege.

What greater obscenity could there be against the Word than to misrepresent Christ's Message as a prohibition against all self-effort. One can understand that position if it's limited in scope to earning ones' salvation, but that's not at all the way it comes across. Therein lies the problem, and it may well be that many see it too comprehensively as a full prohibition of any and all 'works', not just those efforts put forth with intent to earn salvation.

4). *There must be no illusion that man could contribute anything by his own efforts to his salvation.*"

Yet, Christians are admonished to "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." There certainly is a component of self-effort involved in true Christianity, and the next verse, consistent with Ephesians 2:10, explains exactly why. "*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*" Our self-effort must draw upon the working power of Christ in us, we being His workmanship. What would we say of the individual who is resistant against what God intends to build in him?

### **Gaining Approval?**

Another relevant New Testament passage is found in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15. In the KJV it is worded: "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" The New King James words it a little differently: "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" We are admonished (warned even) to study or exercise diligence in order to be 'approved' of God. IF He had already 'done it all for us', then what would be the basis of our being not approved? Wouldn't we have full approval already?

Obviously, there is a due diligence on our part which identifies us as a 'worker', which is a part of the basis of our approval status. That situation we must establish by involving so called self-effort.

### **Zealous for Works**

Consistent with the prohibition against continuing in sin, as we read in Romans 6:1 and 6:15 is this passage in Titus. "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.*" (Titus 2:11-14) Titus alludes to the correct definition of grace, not the

diluted version common in the present age, one that creates in us an aversion to sin and produces a fervent zeal for good works. This is not your typical evangelicals' definition.

We are also made aware in this passage of the true definition of redemption. It isn't just being forgiven of sin, but it also produces in us a nature which is averse to continued law-breaking, a prime prerequisite of attaining the purified state which God wants to develop in us. Again, if it was 'all done for us' at the onset of our conversion, why would there be any necessity for purification in addition to the redemption He provides us? And, why would 'good works' have any relevance?

Is it reasonable to conclude that those without this mentioned 'zeal for good works' haven't yet attained the salvation mentioned here in Titus chapter 2?

### **So Close and Yet So Far!**

It would seem, rather, that the great deceiver has hoodwinked some of the prime candidates for salvation into a mind set that frustrates the workmanship of our God in us. Defining grace as a prohibition against the responses appropriate to a changed nature (the sum total of what we are and do) and mortifying faith into a belief only without allowing it to be reflected by appropriate works, results in our denying His workmanship from taking full effect in us. The net effect of that being to give a believer a false sense of salvation.

While we are not saved BY works, neither are we saved without works. "*For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*" (Rom. 2:13)

While we are cautious of committing an offense against God's grace, we ought to be equally mindful of alleging that Christ's nature in us could be an example of lawlessness. Ω

---

#### **■ Recommended additional topics:**

"*The Faulty Logic of Antinomianism*" # 71

"*We are not UNDER the Law*" # 9

"*Growing in the Grace of our Lord*" #3

"*What Must I DO?*" #50

"*The REWARD of the Saved*" #64

---