

**Works Before
Salvation
and
Works After
Salvation**

by
Norton M. Rainey, Jr.

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Porter Barrington tells the following story.

“In the first year of my ministry, I sat at the bedside of a dying friend. As we talked of his homegoing, tears filled his eyes. Being young in the Lord, I thought he was afraid to die, and attempted to speak words of encouragement to him. He said, ‘I am not afraid to die; I am ashamed to die.’ He went on to say that Christ was his Savior, but he had lived for self and now had to meet the Lord empty-handed. His life loomed before him as ‘wood, hay and stubble.’ He was ‘saved so as by fire.’”

In this story, we see the purpose of this tract. We believe that salvation is a free gift, yet the Bible has much to say about works in terms of faithful service. To “rightly divide the Word” we must make a clear distinction between the two. It is of great importance to understand the place works have *before* we are saved and *after* salvation.

Questions Regarding Works

In this tract, we want to examine several salient questions related to works before salvation and

works after salvation. These questions are immensely important to every believer.

1. Do works have anything at all to do with our salvation?
2. Do works plus faith together determine whether we are saved or not?
3. Can a Christian lose his or her salvation based on good works or the lack thereof?
4. After a Christian is saved, do works determine whether a believer remains saved?
5. If good works are necessary for salvation, how many good works must a believer do?
6. What must the quality of the good works be to remain a Christian?
7. Is there a difference between works of faith and works of righteousness?

Works Before Salvation

*“⁸For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:8-10***

In **Ephesians 2:8, 9**, we read that we are saved by grace through faith. In other words, it was grace that saved us, with faith (not works) for its instrument. It was nothing you could or did achieve--it was God's gift of grace which saved you.

Someone may ask sincerely if somehow works are connected to, or overlap with, grace and faith.

*“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” **Romans 11:6***

This is a clear, plain passage that should answer the questions as related to works and grace (or faith) being connected. Different translations certainly make the distinction between works and grace evident. (They are opposites!)

“But if their choice be the gift of grace, it can no more be deemed the wages of works.” (The Epistles of Paul--W. J. Conybeare)

“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of men’s deeds.” (The New Testament in Modern Speech--Richard F. Weymouth)

“But if it is by HIS unmerited favor, it is not at all conditioned on what they have done.” (The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People--Charles B. Williams)

However, if you need more clarification on **Romans 11:6**, continue reading the following translations:

“If it be gained by works, it is no longer a gift of grace; for work claims wages and not gifts.” (The Epistles of Paul--W. J. Conybeare)

“For the gift that is earned is no gift” (The Epistles of Paul--W. J. Conybeare)

“And since it is through God’s kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God’s grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.” (New Living Translation)

We are dealing with the issue of works before salvation. Do good works have anything at all to do with being born again as Jesus spoke of in **John 3:3, 7**? *“³Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ⁷Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”*

Paul again was inspired to speak to this subject in his writing:

*“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” **Romans 3:28***

“For we maintain that a man is justified by his faith apart from observing the law.” (New International Version)

Paul in the first section of **Romans** is dealing with the doctrine of justification. He is clearly bringing to the reader’s mind that works do not come into play in regard to one’s salvation. How could Paul have made the doctrine of justification any simpler? Paul concludes that justification plus works does not constitute salvation, as many teach. He is stating that a man is counted righteous, justified and born again apart from works and fulfillment of the Law. Paul is saying that a man’s salvation is based on faith, quite apart from the obedience to the Law or works of the

Law (or good works). You would have to pour the meaning out of the English language to make this passage say that works are involved in one's salvation.

There is an abundance of Scripture to further make the case that a man's salvation has nothing at all to do with his own works or labor or service or the Ten Commandments or The Law of Moses. Our salvation is based on the finished work of Christ at the cross.

Dr. Donald Barnhouse tells a story that illustrates the inadequacy of our own works to bring about salvation.

In his mission field, a certain missionary had to do many things for himself and his family. When the baby grew too big for the carriage he started to build a bed for the child. After he prepared the wood, he glued the mortised pieces and was ready to complete the bed. His wife thought it too cold to work in the shed so he brought the materials into the kitchen and started to work. When the bed was finished, the baby was brought into the kitchen and placed in it while his parents gazed admiringly. Suddenly the father had a disquieting thought. Suppose the bed would not go through the door! Quickly he measured bed and door and found the bed one inch too wide to pass through.

There are many people who spend their time building their lives according to the plan of the world. They take great pride in their work, but they make it broader than Christ. The day will come when they suddenly realize the measurements will not allow it to pass Heaven's door. "...strait is the gate, and narrow is the way..." (*Matthew 7:14*), and no human works

can take us through. Christ alone can bring us to God, and when we get there we will find that He has been gracious enough to bring some of our works along, not as the price of our entry into heaven, but as a part of His love for which He will reward us.

Works After Salvation

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:10***

Now, we read of the ordained works in which we should walk. We see that there are works ordained of God for each of us after salvation.

“Created, by our union with Christ Jesus for the good actions.” (The Twentieth Century New Testament)

“Because He has created us through our union with Christ Jesus for doing good deeds.” (The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People--Charles B. Williams)

The ordained works we read about in ***Ephesians 2.10*** are works of faith. Paul is talking about works *as a result* of our salvation; not *in order to earn* our salvation. Many confuse works of faith with works of/for righteousness.

*“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” **Titus 3:5***

Having established in scripture that good works are insufficient for *gaining* salvation, we need to examine whether or not they are necessary or sufficient for *keeping* our salvation. Did God ordain these works for His children in order to keep their place in heaven or their standing before Him, or do they serve another purpose?

If works were a condition placed upon our salvation we would have to ask, how many good works must we do and what must the quality of the works be? We cannot answer those questions! We would not know if we are saved until after we die and stand before the Lord. Our loving heavenly Father wants us to have an assurance of eternal life and our salvation through the finished work of Christ.

*“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may **know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. **I John 5:13** (emphasis added)*

After we become children of God by grace through faith, there are the works that God has ordained for each of us. God has prearranged certain works for our lives. He has predestined good works or actions in which we should walk. My works or your works are not the same as anyone else’s.

*“Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.” **I Corinthians 3:8***

In this passage, we see a connection between labor and rewards. We see a tie between service and wages. One’s pay, or wages, would be in proportion

to one's labor. As we read further, we can see what the Apostle Paul is teaching.

“According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” I Corinthians 3:10-15

Christ is our foundation the moment we become believers through faith in Him. Upon this foundation of Jesus, we can use two kinds of materials for building our lives. One material is comprised of wood, hay, and stubble; the second material is comprised of gold, silver and precious stones. When the fire comes to test our works, the wood, hay and stubble will burn. The gold, silver and precious stones will stand unharmed.

An individual's works will be tested after he or she becomes a believer. A saved person will remain saved no matter what, according to *verse 15*. God does not disown us. But notice what a man can lose. *“He whose work is burned down shall forfeit his reward.”* The works determine the rewards.

Jesus spoke in Revelation:

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” **Revelation 22:12**

Jesus is bringing a reward and recompense to every believer according to his works. He is not bringing salvation; that has already been done.

Is it selfish to talk about receiving rewards for our labor? Not at all, because the glory for our labor goes not to us, but to Christ, the Master Builder. We are His workmanship, and the fruits of our labor showcase His artistry. Woodrow Kroll says that rewards are a gracious wage. He is correct.

It is amazing to realize that we can bring either pleasure or pain to the heart of our Creator by the things we do in this life.

Conclusion

Works are not ordained as a basis for an unsaved person to be redeemed. Our salvation is quite separate and apart from our works.

Prior to a saving faith and becoming “born again,” we can do nothing to merit becoming a child of God. Jesus said, “without Me ye can do nothing,” and **Proverbs 21:4** tells us that even the plowing of the wicked is sin. You cannot do one good thing in the sight of God prior to receiving His Son.

Salvation is clearly a gift and not a reward based on works. After we are saved, however, works are important to the Lord. God has ordained works for each of our lives. God has certain works or service

for each of us to perform. Faithfulness and rewards are connected.

To distinguish between the work that Christ finished at the cross and the works He has prepared for us is of the utmost importance to the Christian.

*All scriptures are from the King James Version of the Bible
unless otherwise noted.*

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