

Can a Person Be Saved Without “Good Works”?

A Study Outline

I. Many people today in Christendom declare that God’s laws are done away, and that “good works” are no longer a part of the Christian’s journey in life ... that good works will not lead a person to a right relationship with Him. Does the Word of God really teach that “good works” are unnecessary for His people, and are they important for the Christian to keep today?

II. God’s Word teaches us to do good works, for the sake of this present life and also for the future.

III. *Works* is usually translated from the Greek *ergon* (Strong 2041) in the New Testament, and is rendered as “deed, doing, labor, work.”

IV. Some major points:

A. The saints are admonished to live by doing good works.

1. Israel was told to live according to the entire law that God gave them.

a. After Israel escaped Egypt (a type of sin), God’s first admonition to them was to diligently listen to the voice of God and *do* that which is right in His sight (Exodus 15:22-26).

b. At Sinai, Israel was told they would be a nation of kings and priests if they *obeyed His voice and kept His covenant*. This involved doing His laws and statutes (Exodus 19:4-6). The central laws were then spelled out in Exodus 20:1-17, and they all involved *works*.

2. That law of God is now internal, within us so we desire to do them, not an external law written in stone (Hebrews 8:7-13).

3. Jesus Christ admonished the scribes and Pharisees to tithe properly, but not to omit judgment, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23). All of these items involve *works*.

Tithing. Paying a tenth of one’s agricultural increase involves sorting out that portion of one’s goods, which involves work.

Justice. Being just requires *doing* things that are correct.

Mercy. Being merciful requires *acts* of mercy, not just good thoughts.

Faith. Faith without *works* (*ergon*) is dead (James 2:14-26).

4. Jesus told the rich young man to keep the commandments in order to enter into eternal life ... and not only that, but sell off his wealth and follow Christ (Matthew 19:16-22).

5. People are known by the fruits, so false prophets bring forth bad fruit and good people bring forth good fruit (Matthew 7:15-20). In the process of producing fruit one must *work*.

6. The servant of others is the greatest of all (Matthew 20:20-28). In order to serve others we must do *good works*.

7. To be righteous we must avoid sin, and sin is the transgression of the laws of God (1 John 3:4; 5:17; Romans 14:23; Psalm 119:172).

8. Abraham was called righteous, and he kept God's "charge, commandments, statutes, and laws" (Genesis 26:5). To do those things he had to perform *works*.
9. Obedience is required by God's people (Hebrews 11:8-10), which requires *good works*.
10. We are God's *laborers* (I Corinthians 3:9-15).
11. We are to love God and our neighbor, which means keeping the commandments (Matthew 22:36-40), and it also means serving our neighbor, or doing *good works* toward him (Galatians 5:13-14).
12. If you say you love God and do not keep His commandments (do good works of the law) you are a liar (I John 2:4).

B. God gives blessings or withholds blessings according to our works.

1. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Blessings and cursings with obedience or disobedience are outlined.
2. It is impossible to be given blessings without keeping God's commandments and statutes.

C. Judgement in the future will relate directly to the works people have performed.

1. *Works (ergon)* of the resurrected dead are the basis for judgment in Revelation 20:12, and also in Revelation 20:13.
2. The "books" being opened relate to our individual lives, which God remembers completely (Psalm 139:13-16).
3. We must give account for every idle word we speak, for each one is remembered by the Eternal (Matthew 12:33-37). Speaking is also a form of *work*.

V. Why the confusion over the necessity of works for salvation?

A. Many people do not want to be bound by God's laws because they do not allow them to exercise the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:17-21), which they think is a better way than God's way. This especially applies to keeping the Sabbaths.

B. Many intelligent people will try to select scriptures that they think say the laws of God are no longer binding on them, in particular so they can avoid having to keep the Sabbath Day which they think may align them with the "Jews".

1. By grace we have been saved through faith, not by ourselves through good works but as a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-10). This means that salvation is a gift, and that works do not save us, but that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in them."
2. Paul stated in Romans 4:6 that man is blessed for righteousness without works, but this is referring to sins being covered, not that the Christian should not do good works.
3. We are *justified* by faith without the deeds of the law, but this in no way means we should not be *doing* the deeds of the law. We are only *justified* apart from the law. For the Christian the law is written in his heart, and he will want to do those good deeds of service to God and to his fellow man. See also Romans 11:5-6 and Galatians 2:15-20. In Galatians 2:20, for Christ to be living within oneself he has to be *doing* the things Christ

did ... which were based upon the laws of behavior in force since creation. See Matthew 5:17-20.

VI. The synthesis of the subject in God's Word:

We are given eternal life and God's spirit as a gift from the Father, and no one can earn that gift (John 6:44), but we do good works as a *consequence* of that calling in order to please our Father. Thus, good works are the *evidence* that we have been called, and are part and parcel with our calling, though they *follow* the gift of God's spirit working within us that motivates us to perform good works to God, to the brethren, and to others.