

Do “Works” have a role in God’s Plan of Redemption?

Scripture states that we are not saved by works

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *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.*

Scripture also states that we are justified by works

James 2:14,24 - *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? - Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

Since God’s Word cannot contradict itself, how can we reconcile the apparent two disparate thoughts? Is there a reasonable solution to this seeming conundrum?

I suggest that the conundrum can be resolved by understanding that there are different kinds of works presented in God’s Word. Those different kinds are:

WORKS OF THE LAW

Romans 3:28 - *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.* (“law” refers to the Mosaic Law)

Romans 6:17 - *But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.* (The Romans were released from the penalty of sin by being “obedient from the heart” to the “form of doctrine”)

Galatians 3:10 - *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.* (Mosaic Law could not save because perfection in regard to compliance was required)

Hebrews 10:4 - *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.* (Mosaic Law had the blood of animals, which could not completely atone for sin)

Galatians 3:24-25 - *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.* (The purpose of the Mosaic Law was to lead people to Christ)

Galatians 2:21 - *I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.* (If the Mosaic Law was sufficient, there would not be a need for Christ to die)

WORKS OF HUMAN MERIT

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *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.* (Works of merit do nothing to affect our salvation. No amount of human effort can atone for sin.)

WORKS OF OBEDIENCE

John 6:28-29: - *Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.* (This “work of God” requires a human response, to believe – Faith is described as a work)

Revelation 2:26 - *And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:* (Here a “work” is synonymous with keeping a command)

Acts 2:38, 3:19 - *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. - Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;* (Repentance, also a component of salvation, is classified as a work)

Matthew 12:41 - *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.* (Those in Nineveh “repented” when Jonah preached to them)

Jonah 3:10 - *And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.* (When God saw their “works”, i.e. they repented of their evil ways – Repentance is described as a work)

IS BAPTISM A WORK OR MERIT?

As stated above, Faith and Repentance are both requirements for the remission of sins and both are classified as works in the Work of God. I am not aware of many persons who would contest this. There is a large contention with forgiveness being tied to baptism. The argument is that baptism is a “human merit” and hence, it should be excluded as a requirement for salvation.

Colossians 2:12 - *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.* (Baptism is not by “human merit”, it is a “working of God”, designed to provide pardon for sin, via Christ’s death and resurrection)

Acts 2:38 - *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Acts 22:16 - *And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.* (These scriptures, in no way, describe baptism as a meritorious work)

Titus 3:5 - *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; (“Washing of regeneration”, i.e. baptism is expressly placed in contrast to “works of righteousness”, i.e. works of merit, which has no power to save)*

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON WORKS

The word “work” simply refers to something that takes effort.

Faith is a Work – John 6:27-29 - *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*

Faith is something we are commanded to have – Hebrews 11:6 - *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

James reinforces this – James 2:17-18 - *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 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.*

Paul talks about the obedience of faith – Romans 1:5 - *By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: and Romans 16:26 - But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:*

Hence, Faith and Works are intertwined

In this sense, Baptism is also a work – Colossians 2:11-12 - *In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*

If God says that something saves but man determines it is unnecessary, who should be believed?

Acts 2:38 - *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

1 Peter 3:21 - *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:*