

The Role of Works Now & at the Final Judgment

Since the Protestant Reformation there has been an almost hyper-focus on salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, and this, for very good reason (especially among Evangelicals). One speck of works unto justification (being acquitted of all guilt) and salvation (being delivered from ALL divine condemnation and wrath) contaminates the very essence of our faith in Christ's all-sufficient work on our behalf and God's absolutely free gift of grace. Unfortunately, this necessary doctrinal emphasis has at times been at the expense of wrestling with key NT texts that imply, if not demand, our compliance to commandments with a life that is led and empowered by the Spirit of God.

Many biblical Christians are left wondering just how to understand these texts that call us to repentance and holiness, particularly as it concerns their appearing to bear on our justification and salvation both here and now AND in the hereafter. Another confusing matter arises when the LDS Church hails many of these texts as evidence that the Bible authenticates the LDS gospel—a gospel that makes works “a critical and necessary” condition for salvation.

Examine the below passages from biblical Scripture to understand and internalize the implications of their meaning so that you might share “the truth in love” with Latter-day Saints AND biblical Christians (**Eph. 4:15**).

2 Peter 1:5-11 (NIV2011)

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;

⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election.

For if you do these things, you will never stumble,

¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

1. The above passage is very useful for helping biblical Christians navigate this and the following texts insofar as the role of works in our lives and salvation is concerned. The bottom line is we must be willing to admit that while faith is the “root” and BASIS OF our salvation, works are the necessary, evidential “fruit” of our salvation and IN ACCORDANCE with our salvation. The degree to which serious sin *characterizes our lives* is also THE DEGREE to which our salvation cannot be reasonably and confidently confirmed or assured.

This in NO WAY compromises the Gospel of grace but IT DOES call into question whether our faith is indeed genuine and the Spirit of God has indeed invaded and regenerated our hearts (see **2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Jn. 4:16-19**).

2. Many of the below passages make clear that at the final judgment God will not declare His verdict without putting our life of deeds on full display. To be sure, those who remain under God’s wrath (see Jn. 3:36) will be without excuse. The deeds of the righteous in Christ will be IN ACCORDANCE with, but not THE BASIS of, our salvation.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NIV2011)

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’

²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Matthew 25:31-46 (NIV2011)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’

³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

John 5:28-29 (NIV2011)

²⁸ “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice

²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

John 15:6-8 (NIV2011)

⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Acts 26:19-20 (NIV2011)

¹⁹ “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.

²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.

Romans 1:5 (NIV2011)

⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.

Romans 16:26 (NIV2011)

²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—

Romans 2:5-8 (NIV2011)

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done."

⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Romans 2:12-13 (NIV2011)

¹² All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Romans 2:26-27 (NIV2011)

²⁶ So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?

²⁷ The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV2011)

⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men

¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Galatians 5:19-23 (NIV2011)

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live

like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Ephesians 2:1-2 (NIV2011)

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,
² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV2011)

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.
¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV2011)

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,
¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (NIV2011)

³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

James 2:14-24 (NIV2011)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?
Can such faith save them?

¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.

¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

1. One of the primary differences between Paul (in Romans and Galatians) and James (here) on being "considered righteous" (i.e. "justified") is that Paul presupposes a genuine faith and James does not—for James genuine faith must be demonstrated. The immediate context brings this to light given the concerns James addresses with his Jewish-Christian audience (see **James 1:1; 2:1-12**).
2. The "justification" Paul has in view is not precisely the same as the "justification" that James has in mind, although they are related. Justify (*dikaioō*) can mean to "make a legal declaration" (as with Paul) or to "show" or "prove" (as with James). God's legal declaration of Abraham's righteousness in **Genesis 15:6** occurred several years before Abraham's demonstration of it by offering Isaac in **Genesis 22:9-12**.

1 Peter 1:17 (NIV2011)

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

1 John 2:3-6 (NIV2011)

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.

⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.

⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him:

⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.