

Degrees of Reward and Punishment

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Saving Faith Has Works

If we are in Christ, then such will be evidenced by good works. Good works are the evidence of our justification and right relationship with God.

In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul spoke of his abundant work for the Lord; he said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

Paul did not do the many good works that he did in an effort to gain salvation; rather it was the grace of God and salvation itself that led Paul to do what he did.

We are indeed to do good works, but it is God (through His Holy Spirit) who enables us to do these good works. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Acts 26:20 speaks of "performing deeds appropriate to repentance."

In Matthew 3:8, John the Baptist similarly said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance."

Galatians 5:6 speaks of "faith working through love."

Paul said in Romans 4 that Abraham was not saved by works of the Law.

But Jesus said in John 8:39, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham." If indeed they were his sons, then they would produce the natural fruits of sonship. Those who are sons of God will produce fruits of evidence showing that they do indeed belong to Him.

Thus, in James 2:14ff, it is shown that Abraham's faith was evidenced by his works. Furthermore, without such works, he would not be justified. A faith that does not have such works is not a true saving faith (v14).

As Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love me, [you will] keep my commandments."

Surely the Bible shows that genuine faith in Jesus Christ will exhibit itself in genuine acts of good deeds, godliness, and righteous living.

Our Works Do Not Merit Salvation

There is obviously a direct correlation between a person's true character (whether in Christ or not) and his deeds. Thus to judge one according to his deeds is really to judge if he is truly in Christ! Doing such works, however, does not enable us to stand before God deserving of salvation and meriting eternal life.

Being judged/justified by works does not mean that we will merit or deserve our eternal reward based on our own good deeds. Such works are merely indicative of our faithfulness to Him. And if faithful, then we are found to be "in Christ" at the Day of Judgment and thus granted eternal life, not on our merit, but on His!

Again, we are not saved by our own efforts at sanctification (even though true faith will result in a determined effort to become more Christ-like day by day); we are saved (and thus shall inherit eternal life) by justification through Jesus Christ.

We indeed need to say (as Jesus taught), "We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done" (Luke 17:10).

Romans 4:4-5 says, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness."

Romans 11:6 "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace."

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

Titus 3:4-5 "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

2 Timothy 1:9 "[God] has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."

Isaiah 64:6 says, "All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." Despite all our good works, we still stand in need of a Savior and cannot be cleansed on our own. Our cleansing is a gift of God that we will never deserve by our own meritorious deeds.

A good example of this is that of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. V1 says, "Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper."

The chapter goes on to tell about the prophet Elisha, the man of God. Elisha told Naaman, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean" (v10).

At first Naaman wanted to be cleansed on his own terms, but finally, "He went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (v14).

Notice that Naaman had to obey God in order to be cleansed, but he certainly didn't merit his cleansing. The cleansing was still a gift of God, just as is our spiritual cleansing through Christ.

Judged by Our Works

Since genuine saving faith produces genuine good works, we are therefore justified, not only by faith, but by our works. And thus, in a sense, we are judged by our deeds. Numerous passages of Scripture refer to this (in the apparent context of salvation in general)...

Romans 14:12 "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God."

Matthew 25:31-46 Those who have fed, clothed, etc. will "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Those who failed to do so "will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

John 5:28-29 "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."

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