

Grace versus Works Salvation

Sunday School Lesson #1 Grace versus Works Salvation: There are three different schools of thought in Christianity concerning Grace and Works and how each impacts our eternal salvation. These three concepts are:

1. Many Evangelical and Charismatic denominations believe that grace only saves us, and our works have little importance in determining our eternal salvation. While these denominations may teach and practice good works, they do not believe that these works will have any impact on our salvation. Some even disparage works as being as “filthy rags” in God’s eyes.
2. Other larger Christian denominations rely more on works and religious ceremonies and traditions in order to be righteous, and by these works they obtain salvation. These groups do mention the grace of God but do not lend the importance and reliance on grace as other denominations might.
3. A few churches believe that both Works and Grace are essential for Salvation. These few groups believe that without Grace, salvation would be impossible, however also believe this Grace is given conditionally wherein only those who truly repent, exhibit good works and endure unto the end are saved.

What do the scriptures teach about these concepts? Each of the denominations use various scriptures to support their beliefs, however, as is often the case, they choose to completely ignore perfectly sound scriptures that disagree with their beliefs. A better method would be to set tradition aside for a while and examine all of the scriptures as a whole and a better and more complete understanding of the Gospel can be obtained. To start, this lesson will begin with Grace and then cover other related aspects of this topic.

Grace: The scriptures have numerous passages concerning grace, and when properly interpreted and taken in the author’s intended context... the Bible and Book of Mormon universally agree on the subject.

Easton’s Bible Dictionary: GRACE (1.) Of form or person (Prov. 1:9; 3:22; Ps. 45:2). (2.) Favour, kindness, friendship (Gen. 6:8; 18:3; 19:19; 2 Tim. 1:9). (3.) God’s forgiving mercy (Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:5). (4.) The gospel as distinguished from the law (John 1:17; Rom. 6:14; 1 Pet. 5:12). (5.) Gifts freely bestowed by God; as miracles, prophecy, tongues (Rom. 15:15; 1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:8). (6.) Christian virtues (2 Cor. 8:7; 2 Pet. 3:18). (7.) The glory hereafter to be revealed (1 Pet. 1:13)."

Webster’s Dictionary: BELIEVE, *verb intransitive* To have a firm persuasion of any thing. In some cases, to have full persuasion, approaching to certainty; in others, more doubt is implied. It is often followed by *in* or *on*, especially in the scriptures. *To believe in*, is to hold as the object of faith. "Ye *believe in* God, *believe also in* me." John 14. *To believe on*, is to trust, to place full confidence in, to rest upon with faith. "To them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that *believe on* his name." John 1. *Johnson*. But there is no ground for much distinction.

In *theology*, to *believe* sometimes expresses a mere assent of the understanding to the truths of the gospel; as in the case of Simon. Acts 8. In others, the word implies, with this assent of the mind, a yielding of the will and affections, accompanied with a humble reliance on Christ for salvation. John 1:12.

Scripture Passages concerning Grace:

John 1:14-17 ... the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
John 3:14-17... God gave his Son... not to condemn world... through him be saved...
Acts 2:21... whosoever shall call upon the Lord shall be saved...
Acts 15:1-41... believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved..
Acts 16:27-34... what must I do to be saved?... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ...
Romans 3:1-30... none righteous...none doeth good... justified freely by his grace...
Romans 4:1-25... Abraham believed God... faith counted for righteousness...
Romans 5:1-21... justified by faith... free gift... by one man, Jesus Christ...
Romans 10:9-17... confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus... shalt be saved...
1 Corinthians 15:1-11...Christ died for our sins... I am the least of the Apostles...
Ephesians 2:8-9... by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works...
Titus 3:1-7... Not by works of righteousness... his mercy saved us...
2 Nephi 1:71-78... intercession for all men...believe in him shall be saved...
2 Nephi 6:99-105... His condescensions... grace and mercy...
2 Nephi 8:11-12... my soul delighteth in his grace... justice... mercy...
2 Nephi 11:22... healing in his wings... all who believe on his name shall be saved...
2 Nephi 11:43-46... by grace we are saved, after all we can do...
Jacob 3:7-16... by his grace, condescensions, through atonement...
Alma 3:83-84... full of grace... take away sins... who steadfastly believe...
Alma 7:40... full of grace, equity, truth, patience, mercy, longsuffering...
Helaman 2:71... no other means man can be saved... atoning blood of Jesus Christ...
Ether 5:28-29... my grace is sufficient for the meek...

Questions:

1. Do the scriptures teach Grace is essential for Salvation?
2. Does the Book of Mormon teach the same as the Bible concerning Grace?
3. What does it mean to “Believe” or have “Faith” in order to obtain this Grace?
4. What do the terms “Condescension”, “Intercession” and “Atonement” mean?
5. What were the works that Paul was referring to that did not save us?

Comments:

Both the Bible and Book of Mormon teach that Grace is essential for salvation, that without the Grace of God there would be no hope for salvation and that we should always have gratitude towards God and the sacrifice of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. However, further study of the scriptures can reveal the fact that works can have a very important impact on our salvation and that belief in God, and in His Son Jesus Christ, and in His Grace is much more deeper than a superficial acknowledgement of Christ or God’s existence. The next sections of this lesson will cover these important points.

Works Based Salvation:

The scriptures detail many passages concerning the importance of Good Works, or Christian Works. This can often be confused with the works of the Law of Moses which when accomplished without the good desires of the heart ended up being dead works or empty rituals. The following scriptures should help the Christian understand what God's expectations are concerning Works and how these actions will impact our eternal fate.

Proverbs 24:14... render to every man according to his works
Matthew 5:16... Let your light shine before men...see your good works, glorify Father
Matthew 16:27... shall reward every man according to his works
John 6:28-29... works of God... believe on him
John 14:8-15...believeth on me, the works he shall do also, keep my commandments
Acts 9:36-42...Dorcas full of good works... Peter raised from the dead
Acts 26:20... repent, turn to God, do works meet for repentance
Ephesians 2:10... We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works
1 Timothy 6:17-19... be rich in good works, hold on eternal life.
2 Timothy 3:16-17... man of God be perfect... furnished unto good works
Titus 1:16... they profess God but in works deny him
Titus 2:1-15...pattern of good works, zealous of good works
Titus 3:1-15...ready to every good work...maintain good works
Hebrews 10:23-24...provoke unto love and to good works
James 1:22-27... be doers of the word, not hearers only
James 3:8-13...tongue full of poison, wise man shew good conversation his works
1 Peter 2:11-15... by your good works, glorify God
Revelation 2:1-29... I know thy works, give according to works, keepeth my works
Revelation 3:1-22... I know thy works... thou art lukewarm
Revelation 14:12-13...keep commandments of God, works do follow them
Revelation 20:12-15...judged every man according to their works
1 Nephi 4:43-61...judged of their works, filthy remain filthy
2 Nephi 12:25-30...stand before God, judged according to works
Mosiah 3:21...always abounding in good works, have everlasting salvation
Mosiah 8:70-89...judged of him according to their works
Alma 1:126-129... reap their rewards, eternal happiness or eternal misery
Alma 5:31-44...keeping commandments, always abound in good works, spotless
Alma 7:40-44...redeem those baptized unto repentance, reward of their works
Alma 9:13-32...our works will condemn us, thoughts condemn us
Alma 9:63-73...called priests, exceeding faith and good works
Alma 14:102-104... exerciseth faith, good works, prayeth continually
Alma 16:196-197...atone for their sins, be judged at last day
Alma 17:65-67...teach them never to be weary of good works
3 Nephi 11:32-33...judge of their works, everlasting life, damnation
3 Nephi 12:27-28... stand before me, judge of their works, good or evil
3 Nephi 13:2-5...out of books, people be judged, works be known
Ether 5:4...believeth in God, abounding in good works

Questions:

1. Are good works essential for Salvation?
2. What would these works be?
3. What are the differences between Good Works and the works Paul was referring to that had no impact on our salvation?
4. Why were the works Paul was referring to not considered good?

Comments:

Clearly the Bible and Book of Mormon agree that Good Works are an essential part of our salvation. James teaches that Good Works are proof of our faith, that if there is no proof there is no faith. Many Evangelicals misunderstand some of Paul's writings as being dismissive of Good Works and that it is by Grace only we are saved. The Evangelicals are correct in that Grace does save us but they do not comprehend the Biblical teachings that Grace is conditional and only those who exhibit Good Works receive this Grace. The following passages will detail exactly what some of these Good Works are that we must perform in order to be saved by Grace.

Specific Works Required for Salvation

Proverbs 28:18...whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved
Jeremiah 4:14... wash thine heart from wickedness, mayest be saved
Matthew 10:22...he that endureth to the end shall be saved
Matthew 24:9-13...iniquity shall abound, endure to the end shall be saved
Mark 13:13...hated of all men, endure unto the end shall be saved
Mark 16:16... he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved
John 10:9...I am the door, any man enter in shall be saved
Acts 2:21...whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved
Acts 4:16...none other name under heaven whereby we must be saved
Acts 16:27-34...Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, was baptized, rejoiced
1 Corinthians 15:1-3...ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached
1 Peter 3:21...baptism doth also now save us, good conscience, of Jesus Christ
1 Nephi 2:4... come unto God... and be saved
1 Nephi 4:16-24...natural branches come to knowledge of the Gospel, be saved
2 Nephi 7:40-44...choose way, reconcile yourselves, grace of God saved
2 Nephi 13:7-32...repent, baptized, follow me, endure to the end, be saved
Omni 1:46-47...fasting and prayer, endure to the end, ye will be saved
Mosiah 1:115-130...yield to Holy Spirit, patient, full of love, judged every man
Mosiah 2:9-17...trust in Lord, keeping his commandments, see that ye do them
Alma 3:7-70...mighty change in heart, born of God, exercise faith
Alma 19:32-117...none but the truly penitent are saved
Helaman 5:84-86...free to act for selves, choose life or death
3 Nephi 4:49-52...broken heart, repenteth, little child, and be saved
3 Nephi 5:63-68... let your light shine, except keep commandments not be saved
Moroni 7:35-44...repent, be baptized, have faith, be saved
Moroni 10:14-21...must be faith, hope charity or no wise be saved

Questions:

1. List what works are required for Salvation
2. What works were NOT mentioned as required for salvation?
3. How do you reconcile the scriptures that teach Grace only saves us?

Comments:

Again the Bible and Book of Mormon teach identical doctrines concerning God's requirements for works in order to be saved. This does not negate the requirement for Grace in order to be saved... but strongly and clearly points out that only those who practice these works are given the Grace of God. The next section of scriptures will highlight the teaching of Conditional Grace:

Scriptures Teaching Conditional Grace

Romans 3:31...make void the law through faith? God forbid, we establish the law
Romans 6:1-23...continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid, dead to sin
James 2:14-26...faith without works is dead, devils also believe
1 Peter 4:17-19... righteous scarcely be saved
Alma 8:90-107...not save people in their sins, judged according to works
Helaman 2:71-75...not redeem in their sins, redeem from their sins
Helaman 4:68-73...grace according to works...some cast off
Moroni 10:20-31...deny ungodliness, love God with might, then is grace sufficient

Comments:

Clearly both the Bible and Book of Mormon teach the Conditional Grace doctrine wherein the Grace of God is only applied under certain conditions. Some Evangelical denominations only go a little ways in stating "Mouth confession" or having Faith is required to receive this grace however there are multitudes of other scriptures from the Bible (as well as Book of Mormon) that show a much more deeper commitment is required of the Christian. These requirements entail Faith, Confession, Repentance, A Heart Change, Contrite and Broken Heart, Baptism by Immersion, Keeping God's Commandments, and especially Enduring unto the End. It is not logical that keeping God's commandments of having Faith and Belief in His Son would somehow negate all of God's other commandments. This leads to the next section of this lesson... addressing the false doctrine of "Once Saved Always Saved"

Once Saved Always Saved – A False Doctrine

Some Protestant or Evangelical denominations believe that once you accept Christ as your personal Savior you are saved... and there cannot be anything you do to undo that salvation. Their logic is based on the false assumption that we are hopeless sinners and cannot help sinning, so why bother trying... just accept Jesus and His Grace is sufficient to save us alone. Other larger denominations believe membership, baptism, or weekly confessions can save you in much the same manner. Clearly the above scriptures debunk these myths however there are more scriptures that directly address these false teachings:

Scriptures Debunking “Once Saved Always Saved”

Psalms 12:1-5... flattering lips, double heart, oppression of poor
Proverbs 26:11... dog returneth to vomit, fool his folly
Isaiah 29:13-21... lips do honor me, removed their heart from me, precept of men
Matthew 7:13-29... not every one that saith Lord Lord shall enter kingdom of heaven
Matthew 12:43-45... unclean spirit gone out, return, seven other spirits more wicked
Matthew 15:7-14... honoureth me with their lips, heart is far from me
Matthew 23:1-39... observe Pharisees teachings, not examples
Matthew 25:1-46... parable of the 10 virgins, talents, sheep and goats
Mark 7:6-9... honoureth with lips, reject commandment of God, traditions of men
Luke 6:43-49... why call me Lord Lord and do not the things which I say
Luke 13:26-28... few be saved? Workers of iniquity
1 Corinthians 9:24-27... run race, keep body in subjection lest myself be castaway
Philippians 3:10-14... not already attained, press toward mark
Hebrews 6:4-9... once enlightened, fall away, impossible to renew unto repentance
2 Peter 2:1-22... false prophets, teachers, dog turned to his own vomit, sow mire
2 Nephi 12:3-40... say I am the Lord's, all gone astray save a few, carnal security
Alma 1:3-24... Nehor taught all will be saved, murdered Gideon, executed, priestcraft
3 Nephi 3:42-43... few righteous, dog to his vomit, sow to mire
3 Nephi 6:25-37... strait gate, good tree, say Lord Lord, work iniquity
4 Nephi 1:26-53... churches professed Christ, deny gospel, persecute true church

Comments:

Again the Bible and Book of Mormon are in harmony and teach against the false doctrine of “Once Saved, Always Saved”. Apostasy of the Christian is always a clear and present danger. Even the Apostle Judas Iscariot completely apostatized and was damned, while others such as Moses and Peter made serious mistakes but repented and were forgiven. People are tempted by Satan to embrace “Once Saved, Always Saved” because it is pleasing to the carnal mind... it is easier to do and you don't have to worry about resisting sin. Some Bible scholars also are in agreement with the Book of Mormon and stand against this false doctrine:

Easton's Bible Dictionary: Works

Works, Good The old objection against the doctrine of salvation by grace, that it does away with the necessity of good works, and lowers the sense of their importance (Rom. 6), although it has been answered a thousand times, is still alleged by many. They say if men are not saved by works, then works are not necessary. If the most moral of men are saved in the same way as the very chief of sinners, then good works are of no moment. And more than this, if the grace of God is most clearly displayed in the salvation of the vilest of men, then the worse men are the better.

The objection has no validity. The gospel of salvation by grace shows that good works are necessary. It is true, unchangeably true, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. "Neither adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards" shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Works are "good" only when, (1) they spring from the principle of love to God. The moral character of an act is determined by the moral principle that prompts it. Faith and love in the heart are the essential elements of all true obedience. Hence good works only spring from a believing heart, can only be wrought by one reconciled to God (Eph. 2:10; James 2:18:22).

(2.) Good works have the glory of God as their object; and (3) they have the revealed will of God as their only rule (Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18, 19).

Good works are an expression of gratitude in the believer's heart (John 14:15, 23; Gal. 5:6). They are the fruits of the Spirit (Titus 2:10-12), and thus spring from grace, which they illustrate and strengthen in the heart.

Good works of the most sincere believers are all imperfect, yet like their persons they are accepted through the mediation of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17), and so are rewarded; they have no merit intrinsically, but are rewarded wholly of grace."

Paul's Teaching Against Works

What of the numerous scriptures from Paul's writings that seem to disparage works or teach that works does not save us? Why does some of Paul's teachings promote Grace and Good Works yet in other passages he seems to teach works are worthless? Some of the following scriptures can help shed light on this mystery.

Psalms 14:1-4...none doeth good, workers of iniquity, eat up my people

Psalms 53:1-4...none doeth good, every one gone back

Isaiah 66:2-3...sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck

Romans 3:1-31...what profit circumcision? none doeth good, law none justified

Galatians 2:11-21...Peter blamed, justified by faith, not works, circumcision

2 Peter 3:13-18...Paul's epistles, hard to understand, unlearned wrest scriptures

Moroni 8:20-27...little children need no baptism, trust in dead works

Comments:

The works Paul was referring to was the works of the Law of Moses... the animal sacrifices, circumcision and other rituals which were fulfilled in Christ. These works had become empty rituals or dead works meaning absolutely nothing. The people blindly followed the traditions passed down to them from their parents but had no real comprehension of those traditions, and their hearts were corrupted and not turned to God. Paul received a marvelous outpouring of God's grace when he was forgiven and called to preach for Christ's church when he had beforetime persecuted it and this is why many of his teachings focused on grace and the worthlessness of the works of the Law of Moses. This has nothing to do with Good Works or Christian Works which Paul continued to teach and support as well as did all of the other authors of the scriptures. Paul was a learned Pharisee whose advanced learning and writing skills were difficult to interpret and translate at times, causing some people to continue to stumble to this day with these false teachings. The other misconception of some Evangelicals is that it is impossible for the Christian to be perfect and so why try? Their logic is that if you fall short in a small matter you are just as fallen as you would be in a big sin and it is by grace only you are saved. There is a better interpretation of the scriptures concerning Perfection:

What the Scriptures Teach about Perfection

Webster's Dictionary: Perfect

PER'FECTION, *verb transitive* [Latin *perfectus, perficio.*] To finish or complete so as to leave nothing wanting; to give to any thing all that is requisite to its nature and kind; as, to *perfect* a picture or statue. 2 Chronicles 8.

Matthew 5:48...be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect

Matthew 19:16-17...why callest me good? None good but God

Luke 13:32... the third day I shall be perfected

Philippians 3:15...as many as be perfect

Colossians 4:12...stand perfect and complete in the will of God

James 1:4...let patience work, ye may be perfect, wanting nothing

1 Peter 5:10...suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you

3 Nephi 5:92...ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father in heaven perfect

Moroni 10:29-30...deny ungodliness, by grace of God perfect in Christ

Comments:

The term perfection is actually meaning completeness, wholeness... not being absolutely without sin. There are some passages in the New Testament that indicate Jesus did not yet consider himself "Good" or "Perfected" yet because he had one thing yet to accomplish... enduring unto the end and facing his crucifixion. When Jesus visited the Nephites this and his resurrection was already accomplished then he accepted the title of perfection. The way we become perfect in Christ is to fulfill all of the good works as taught in God's commandments, endure unto the end, then with God's grace we are made perfect. Surely with this understanding perfection is obtainable... after all it would be ridiculous for Jesus to command us to be perfect if it were unobtainable.

1 Nephi 1:65 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father, I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.