

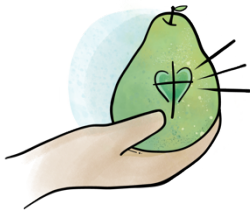
What are good works?

Understanding the role of good works comes with layers of complexity and misunderstanding. For many, good works are seen as religious duties: adhering to God's commandments, engaging in temple practices, prayer, scripture study, and daily moral improvement. They are perceived as aligning with God's will, contributing to building Zion and spreading the gospel.

Yet, this view does not capture the biblical essence of good works. In understanding faith's nature, we uncover that it's not about religious tasks but an inner transformation worked by God. According to the Bible, good works are the manifestation of the grace and mercy received through Christ.

This article explores good works from a biblical standpoint, not as a means to earn or learn a higher place in eternal life or God's favor, but as the natural expression of faith and salvation secured by God's grace through Jesus Christ. We will examine how, in Christian life, good works are not burdensome obligations but a joyful expression of the transformative impact of Christ within us.

What does the narrative of the Bible show us about good works?



In the Old Testament, the narrative of good works is interwoven with faith. Figures like Abraham, who demonstrated his faith through action (Genesis 22), and Moses, who adhered to God's commands (Exodus 40:16), exemplify this. Their actions weren't about earning God's favor; instead, they were responses to the relationship already established with God, grounded in trust and commitment.

The wisdom literature, such as Psalms and Proverbs, highlights that living righteously and engaging in good deeds are indicative of a life aligned with God's will. These actions are seen as fruits of a life that understands and cherishes God's grace and guidance (Psalm 15; Proverbs 21:3).

The prophets, particularly Isaiah and Micah, emphasize that true faith is shown through actions, especially in justice and care for the less fortunate (Isaiah 1:17; Micah 6:8). This perspective underscores that good works are an outward manifestation of an inward faith, a faith that is sensitive to God's heart and his desires for humanity.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ's teachings clarify the role of good works. He affirms that acts of love, mercy, and compassion are integral to following him (Matthew 25:34-40). However, Jesus also makes it clear that these works are not what secure the forgiveness of sins or eternal life. They are the evidence of a life transformed by faith in him and a deep relationship with God.

The apostle Paul emphasizes that while salvation is by grace through faith, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9), believers are created in Christ Jesus to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). This shows that good works are a vital aspect of Christian living, not for earning eternal life, but as a fruit of the transformative power of faith in Christ.

James reinforces this by stating that faith without works is dead (James 2:26). This assertion aligns with the view that genuine faith naturally produces good works. These works are not the root of our salvation but are a reflection of a living and active faith.

In Revelation, faithfulness and perseverance are often linked with deeds, illustrating that good works remain a significant aspect of Christian witness (Revelation 2-3, 20:12-13).

Therefore, in the biblical view, good works are a crucial expression of our faith and love for God. They are not the currency for earning God's grace or favor but are the natural outpouring of a heart transformed by the good news of Jesus' redemptive work for you.

What is a biblical definition of good works?

Good works are actions that reflect a person's trust in and love for God. They are deeds done in accordance with God's will and commandments, motivated by gratitude and a desire to honor him. Good works stem from a heart transformed by the gospel and are not performed to earn forgiveness or favor with God but as a natural expression of a living and active faith.

The Bible clearly states that good works do not earn salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 affirms, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Salvation comes solely through faith in Jesus Christ, not by any efforts or works of our own.

For believers, good works are not a means to gain eternal life with God but a response to God's saving grace. They are like breathing to a living person, a natural and effortless expression of one's new life in Christ. Recognizing that God has done everything, including granting faith, Christians center their lives on praising and worshiping him, with Christ at the center of it all.

Am I saved by grace or works or both?

The relationship between faith and works is often misinterpreted. While our works do not save us, genuine faith—trust in the work of Christ—naturally produces good works as its fruit. James 2:17 declares, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." This connection does not mean that works contribute to our eternal life but are evidence of a living faith. True faith manifests in actions that reflect God's love and righteousness.

Eternal life is not a blend of grace and works. It is solely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, with good works as a product of the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. These works arise from love and gratitude, not from a sense of duty or a desire to earn God's favor. Believers in Christ reflect the love and relationship they have received from God, not an ongoing effort to earn them.

What role do good works play in the Christian life?

While good works have no part in earning salvation, they naturally flow from genuine faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10). Justified believers, enabled by the Spirit, do good works because of their relationship with God; out of gratitude, not compulsion or obligation. Good works verify faith before others and glorify God, but never secure forgiveness or favor with God (Matthew 5:16, James 2:18).

The Bible encourages good works, but the motivation behind them is crucial. Works done in gratitude are praised, while those performed to earn a place in eternal life are not. John 14:15 and 1 John 4:19 highlight that our obedience and love for God are responses to his love, especially his saving love.

For those who think they must contribute to their salvation, fear and anxiety often accompany them. In contrast, recognizing eternal life as a gift from God leads to joy and gratitude, inspiring godly living.

What is the purpose of good works?

We were created to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). Good works serve our neighbors and bring glory to God (Matthew 5:16). They are motivated by Christ's love and done out of thanks for our free salvation (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Good works also provide a Christian witness that God has transformed our hearts and lives (Matthew 5:16, 1 Peter 2:12).

How do I know what God considers to be good?

God reveals what is good, noble, and pleasing to him primarily through his word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Ten Commandments provide a summary of God's moral law and will for our lives (Exodus 20:1-17). When unsure about specific situations, we should evaluate choices biblically and in prayer while relying on the Spirit's wisdom (James 1:5, Romans 12:2).

What does James 2 teach about the relationship between faith and works?

The book of James provides valuable insights into the relationship between faith and works. James emphasizes that genuine faith naturally produces good works as a visible expression of reconciliation with God. He asks, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?" (James 2:14) In other words, true faith is not just a mere profession; it leads to transformed lives and actions that reflect Christ's love and compassion.

James says faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Authentic trust in the work of Christ will inevitably produce good works, demonstrating the living and vibrant nature of one's relationship with God. These works are not a means to secure eternal life; they become the fruit of one's faith, arising from the joy of salvation and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit within believers.

The apostle James affirms that genuine faith always produces fruit, such as good works. He corrects mistaken notions that mere intellectual assent to the gospel is true saving faith. Works naturally follow from living, active faith but are not a prerequisite to gaining eternal life with God. We are saved by grace—God's unconditional love—alone through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), yet living faith is never alone but accompanied by works.

Finally, James uses Rahab and Abraham as examples of believers acting according to their faith.

Looking Closer: Good Works

Abraham, often called the Father of Faith, profoundly illustrates the relationship between faith and good works. Genesis 15:6 states, “Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” It was through faith that Abraham was declared righteous before God, apart from any works he had done.

However, in his letter to early Christians, James raises an important point, asking, “Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?” (James 2:21). Here, James highlights Abraham’s obedience in sacrificing Isaac as an act of faith, revealing the genuineness of his trust in God.

Though these perspectives on Abraham’s faith and works may seem contrasting and conflicting, they provide a comprehensive view of the relationship between faith and good works. Faith serves as the foundation of our righteousness before God. Through faith, Abraham believed in God’s promises and placed unwavering trust in him, resulting in righteousness not earned through deeds.

However, James emphasizes that genuine faith cannot remain inactive. True faith inevitably produces good works as a natural expression of one’s relationship with God. Just as a healthy tree bears fruit, a living and vibrant faith bears the fruit of good works. Abraham’s obedience in offering Isaac shows his genuine faith in God and willingness to follow God’s instructions, even in the most challenging circumstances.

James eloquently explains that faith and works are closely connected. While faith is invisible to man, the works it produces are visible evidence of its presence. James compares the relationship between faith and works to the relationship between the body and the spirit. As a body without a spirit is lifeless, faith without works lacks vitality (James 2:26).

Abraham’s example beautifully illustrates the inseparable link between faith and works. His faith in God’s promises was credited as righteousness, and his subsequent obedience to God’s call demonstrated the authenticity and vitality of his faith. Similarly, for believers today, genuine faith in Jesus Christ is the root, and good works are the fruit that naturally stems from that faith, revealing its living and transformative power reflecting God’s love and bringing glory to him.

Why do believers do good works?

Like Abraham, believers throughout history do good works not *for* eternal life but *from* eternal life. The forgiveness of sins, status as a child of God, and eternal life are secured by Christ’s finished work on the cross, and no human effort can add to it. Good works are not a means to gain God’s favor or secure our worthiness; they flow from a heartfelt response to his grace and love.

The idea that our effort, work, or obedience keep us in God’s good graces undermines the biblical teaching that things between Christians and God are forever settled because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Our salvation is a free gift received through faith, not by our own merits. We are not saved by our works, but our works are the “fruit” of our salvation.

Think for a minute about apple trees. Why is it that they produce apples? Is it because they'll feel guilty if they don't? Is it because they will be in trouble if they don't grow enough fruit? That's foolish! Apple trees produce apples because that's just what apple trees do. It's natural.

Those who trust in Jesus produce good works, not because they'll feel guilty if they don't, and not because they're afraid that otherwise they would get in trouble with God. Instead, believers produce good works because they are a new creation in Christ. It's what they naturally do!

Talking about this root/fruit connection, in John 15:4-5, Jesus said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Likewise, the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God."

Those passages tell us something about who can do good works. To do what God considers to be "good works," you need to be connected to Christ, and that connection is made by faith in Christ alone.

If you don't trust that Jesus is enough, you won't be able to do good works in God's eyes. Therefore, only believers do works God considers to be good.

In Christ, we find freedom from trying to earn our way to God and peace in being covered by Christ's righteousness. We joyfully embrace the truth that Jesus is enough. Good works become a reflection of the love and grace we have received, not a duty or obligation. As believers, we walk in the joy of our salvation, and our deeds become a testimony of God's transforming power in us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, rejoicing in his grace, and may our deeds reflect the love that flows "from" our salvation in Christ. Our faith and works go hand in hand, displaying the beauty of a living and genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. Let our service in Christ declare, "Jesus is enough."

Bible Verses about Good Works

- Galatians 2:20
- John 15:5
- Hebrews 11:6
- Galatians 5:22-23
- Romans 6:18
- 2 Corinthians 5:14

Songs about Good Works

- **"Jesus, Priceless Treasure"** by Johann Franck and translated by Catherine Winkworth extols the preciousness of Christ and leads to lives of devotion and praise.

- **“Take My Life and Let It Be”** by Frances Ridley Havergal is a beautiful prayer of consecration, where the believer surrenders every aspect of their life to God’s service and desires to live wholly for him.