
“Come, Let Us Reason Together” About the Bible
What Is Salvation?
Bible Study Series

“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

LESSON SIX — Is Salvation By Works?

Estimated Reading Time: 9 - 10 minutes

What comes to mind when you hear the word, “**works**”?

For many people, it’s about effort, something you do. You might hear someone say, “*That plan only works if you put in the work,*” or “*Hard work pays off.*” Others may think of jobs or tasks, like “*I’ve got a lot of work to do today.*” Some even speak of religious “good works,” like helping the poor, or volunteering at a food pantry or nursing home.

So, in general, “**works**” usually refers to **actions, deeds, or efforts**. That is to say what someone does, not just what they believe or feel.

When it comes to **salvation**, the word “works” becomes a little more complicated because some people say that salvation has nothing to do with works at all, while others say your works play a major role.

What does the **Bible actually say about “Works”**? What role do works play in salvation, if any? Are you saved by works, or not?

What Are “Works”?

In everyday life, a **work** is any action you perform whether it’s physical, mental, or spiritual. That idea carries over into the Bible.

In Scripture, “works” can mean a few things, depending on the context:

1. **Works of the Law** refer to the Law of Moses (Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16)
2. **Works of the flesh** are sinful deeds (Galatians 5:19)
3. **Good works** are actions pleasing to God and flow from faith and obedience (Ephesians 2:10)

The Bible does not lump all works together as either good or bad. It distinguishes between **works that try to earn salvation** and **works that result from faith**.

Works in the Old Testament

Old Testament writers had a lot to say about works, especially God's works.

“The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them.” (Psalm 111:2)

God’s works included the **creation** of the world, His **deliverance** of Israel from Egypt, the giving of the **Law**, and countless acts of **providence and protection**.

“The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works.” (Psalm 145:17)

But God also expected His people to do good works, not by earning His favor, but to reflect His holiness.

“Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come...” (Isaiah 56:1)

Obedience was not optional. It was the response God desires. Those actions included sacrifices, tithes, justice, mercy, and walking humbly with Him (Micah 6:8).

God's Works Toward Israel

From the moment God called Moses, His relationship with Israel was filled with divine works.

- He **rescued** them from Egypt with ten mighty plagues.
- He **divided the Red Sea**, fed them with manna, and provided water from a rock.
- He **gave them the Law**, led them by cloud and fire, and brought them into the Promised Land.

“He has shown His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations.”
(Psalm 111:6)

God’s works were not just to show His power. They were to **build trust** and **call His people to faith and obedience**.

What Jesus Taught About Works

Jesus had a lot to say about works which are not just believing.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

Jesus didn’t just talk about your works. He also emphasized **His own works** as part of His divine mission:

“I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.” (John 9:4)

Jesus was focused on **completing the works** God had given Him to do, knowing His time on earth was short.

“But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.” (John 5:36)

Jesus pointed to His **works** as proof that He was sent by the Father. His miracles, compassion, and obedience were not just signs, they were **divine credentials**.

“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works...” (John 10:37–38)

Even when people doubted His words, Jesus told them to consider **His works** as evidence of His authority and divinity.

“The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works... He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also...” (John 14:10–12)

Jesus not only attributes His works to the Father, but promises that **believers will also continue doing good works** in His name. This connects faith and action in the lives of His followers.

When John the Baptist was in prison and began to wonder about Jesus, he sent disciples to ask if Jesus was truly the One. Jesus didn’t just give a title, He pointed to His works:

“Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear...” (Matthew 11:4–5)

These were the **works of Christ** exhibiting tangible proof that He was the promised Messiah.

Finally, in the book of Revelation, the glorified Christ addresses the seven churches, and **He evaluates them based on their works**.

“I know your works...” (Revelation 2:2; 2:19; 3:1; 3:8; 3:15)

Repeatedly, Jesus says this. He doesn’t just say “I know your faith” or “I know your heart,” but **“I know your works.”** This tells you that your actions, obedience, service, endurance, and love, **matter**.

So, from beginning to end, Jesus teaches that **faith must lead to works**, and that your works are not only evidence of your discipleship, they are what He will use to evaluate you, His follower.

In other words, **faith that doesn’t act, or work, is useless**.

What the New Testament Says About Works

Here's where it's important to be precise. The Bible **does not teach** that you are saved by works of **merit** as if you could earn your way to heaven. Paul is clear about that.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...”
(Titus 3:5)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8–9)

But that's not the end of the story. The very next verse says the following:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

You are **not saved by meritorious works**, but you are **saved for works**. Works are the fruit of real, saving faith.

James said it best:.

“Thus, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17)

“You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” (James 2:24)

That's a direct contradiction of the popular doctrine that **“faith alone saves.”** According to the Bible, **faith and works must go together**. Faith without obedient works is empty, it is dead.

Works and the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ

Step back and look at the big picture. The greatest work ever accomplished was done by **God Himself**, through **Jesus Christ**.

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son...” (Galatians 4:4)

“My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” (John 5:17)

Jesus didn't just come to preach. He came to **fulfill the work of redemption**.

“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.”
(John 17:4)

“It is finished.” (John 19:30)

The **death, burial, and resurrection** of Christ is the ultimate **work of God's love, justice, and mercy**. Without that work, **no one could be saved**.

When you respond to the gospel, by believing, repenting, confessing Christ, being baptized, and living faithfully, you're not earning salvation. You're accepting what God has done and walking in the way He commands.

Conclusion: Is Salvation By Works?

Clearly stated: **No, you are not saved by works of merit.** You cannot earn your way to heaven.

Yes, you are saved through **obedient faith that produces works.** Just like Noah built the ark, Abraham left home, and Jesus went to the cross, **true faith acts.**

Salvation is **by grace, through faith, unto good works.** (Ephesians 2:8–10)

So, if someone asks, “*Are you saved by works?*” The biblical answer is **not by works alone, but never without them.**

Walk in the works that God has prepared for you.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58

Questions to Confirm Understanding

Estimated time to answer the questions: 4 – 5 minutes. With scripture lookup: 20 – 30 minutes.

Read and answer the following set of questions about this lesson, and circle your answer: “True | False” or “Yes | No.” Look up the scriptures provided to confirm your answers. Then compare your answers with the Answer Key provided after these questions.

1. **True | False** All “works” in the Bible mean the same thing and are either all good or all bad. (Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 5:19)
2. **True | False** In the Old Testament, God's works included creation, deliverance, and protection. (Psalm 111:2; Psalm 145:17)
3. **True | False** God expected His people in the Old Testament to perform good works as a response to His holiness. (Isaiah 56:1)
4. **True | False** God demonstrated His works to Israel by rescuing them from Egypt and giving them the Law. (Psalm 111:6)
5. **True | False** Jesus taught that people should let their good works be seen to glorify the Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

6. **True | False** Jesus said that even if people didn't believe His words, they should believe the works He did. (John 10:37–38)
7. **True | False** Jesus taught that His followers would never do the works He did. (John 14:12)
8. **True | False** In Revelation, Jesus evaluated the seven churches based on their faith alone, not their works. (Revelation 2:2; 2:19; 3:1; 3:8; 3:15)
9. **True | False** The Bible teaches that you are saved by grace through faith, not by works of merit. (Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:5)
10. **True | False** You are saved by works alone, apart from God's grace and mercy. (Titus 3:5)
11. **True | False** Paul said that Christians are created in Christ for good works, which God prepared in advance. (Ephesians 2:10)
12. **True | False** James wrote that faith without works is dead. (James 2:17)
13. **True | False** According to James, you are justified by works and not by faith only. (James 2:24)
14. **True | False** Jesus described His own ministry as completing the works God gave Him to do. (John 17:4; John 9:4)
15. **True | False** The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was not a work of God. (John 19:30; Galatians 4:4)

Answer Key — Lesson

Estimated time to read the answers: 4 minutes. With reflection and contemplation: 15 - 20 minutes.

1. All “works” in the Bible mean the same thing and are either all good or all bad. — **False**
“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...” (Ephesians 2:10)
“Now the works of the flesh are evident...” (Galatians 5:19)
 Scripture distinguishes between **good works**, **works of the Law**, and **works of the flesh**. Not all are the same.
2. In the Old Testament, God's works included creation, deliverance, and protection. — **True**
“The works of the Lord are great...” (Psalm 111:2)
“The Lord is... gracious in all His works.” (Psalm 145:17)
 God's works include powerful acts in creation, providence, and salvation history.
3. God expected His people in the Old Testament to perform good works as a response to His holiness. — **True**
“Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come.” (Isaiah 56:1)
 Obedience and righteousness were expected as a faithful response to God's salvation and character.

4. God demonstrated His works to Israel by rescuing them from Egypt and giving them the Law. — **True**
“He has shown His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations.”
(Psalm 111:6)
 God’s works were tangible, historic acts Especially note His deliverance of Israel and covenant-making at Sinai.
5. Jesus taught that people should let their good works be seen to glorify the Father in heaven. — **True**
“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father...”
(Matthew 5:16)
 Jesus encouraged people to show their good works to others, not for praise, but so others would glorify God.
6. Jesus said that even if people didn’t believe His words, they should believe the works He did. — **True**
“Though you do not believe Me, believe the works...” *(John 10:38)*
 Jesus used His works (miracles, healing, compassion) as **evidence** of His divine mission.
7. Jesus taught that His followers would never do the works He did. — **False**
“The works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do...” *(John 14:12)*
 Jesus said His followers would **continue His work** and spread His message with power.
8. In Revelation, Jesus evaluated the seven churches based on their faith alone, not their works. — **False**
“I know your works...” *(Revelation 2:2; 2:19; 3:1; 3:8; 3:15)*
 Jesus repeatedly said, “I know your works,” indicating that actions, not just belief, matter to Him.
9. The Bible teaches that you are saved by grace through faith, not by works of merit. — **True**
“For by grace you have been saved through faith... not of works, lest anyone should boast.”
(Ephesians 2:8–9)
“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.”
(Titus 3:5)
 Salvation is not earned like a paycheck. It is a gift received through faith.
10. You are saved by works alone, apart from God’s grace and mercy. — **False**
“Not by works of righteousness... but according to His mercy He saved us.” *(Titus 3:5)*
 God’s mercy, not your merit, is the basis for salvation.
11. Paul said that Christians are created in Christ for good works, which God prepared advance— **True**
“Created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand...” *(Ephesians 2:10)*
 Good works are not optional. They are the purpose of your new life in Christ.

12. James wrote that faith without works is dead. — **True**
“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17)
Faith that does nothing is not genuine saving faith.
13. According to James, you are justified by works and not by faith only. — **True**
“You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” (James 2:24)
James directly opposes the doctrine of faith-only salvation.
14. Jesus described His own ministry as completing the works God gave Him to do. — **True**
“I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” (John 17:4)
Jesus saw His earthly mission as a work from God—completed in full.
15. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was not a work of God. — **False**
“When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son...” (Galatians 4:4)
“It is finished.” (John 19:30)
Christ’s redemptive work culminated in His death and resurrection. It is **the ultimate work of God.**

North Main Church of Christ

1302 N. Main Street
Weatherford, TX 76087
(817) 594-6896
nmaincc@att.net
(ChatGPT assisted)