

What are 'good works'?

The concept of sinners doing good works is fundamental to many errors regarding salvation. The Roman Catholic conception of salvation includes the idea of merit being attained by sinners doing good works in addition to faith in Christ. The Arminian claim that man chooses to believe the Gospel and repent are two human good works necessary for conversion. For Universalists and Pelagians, virtually all of salvation is due to good works.

The Bible declares that all these works are not good, have no spiritual merit and do not form any part of salvation. The doctrine of Total Depravity is taught in many scriptures which are self-explanatory:

Rm 3:10-20: As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one ... There is none who seeks after God ... There is none who does good, no, not one' ... Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight.

Job 14:4: Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? No one!

Job 15:14: ... man, *who is* abominable and filthy, who drinks iniquity like water!

Eph 2:1: And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Thus we can see that sinful man cannot do any good of any kind, even in day-to-day activities (Prov 21:4). He is dead in sins and thus cannot do anything to make him spiritually alive (such as believing). All man does is intrinsically evil.

This also means that those who teach that there is some form of 'common grace' available to every man to enable him to do works that please God are seriously wrong. Grace is only for the elect and is from the cross.

But what about the works of Christians; are they good?

Jesus explained that only God is good, 'So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God.'" (Mk 10:18). Understand this, nothing on this Earth is good unless it is from God; we must not judge according to the flesh but only by God's word. Ordinary man can do no good. Jesus did good works because he was God in human form.

Christians are able to perform good works since they are now in Christ and live by his Spirit; but this necessitates walking in the new man (Eph 4:22-24). As we put on Christ we can do good – and must do good (Gal 6:10). We will do no good if we walk in the flesh, the old nature. So believers do good works as they obey the Spirit, live by faith and thus glorify Christ. This is God working in us to motivate and enable us do good (Phil 2:13). As we do this, we will be rewarded by God, 'I am coming quickly, and my reward *is* with me, to give to every one according to his work', (Rev 22:12).

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Understanding Ministries

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