

Works and Salvation

(Sermon Transcript)

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” *Galatians 2:16*

“Not of works, lest any man should boast.” *Ephesians 2:9*

It was Martin Luther, who was a Catholic priest, who was convicted about his inability to live a righteous life. He had done many things to try to merit God’s favor. One time he was coming up the steps of the Castle of Wittenberg, and it was a long set of steps and he crawled up on his knees. He crawled up even though his knees would bleed, quoting Scripture as a penance for his sin.

One day, as he studied Scripture on a limited basis (since there were restrictions back then), he came upon a verse (while on his knees up the stairs) that he had read many times, but this time he saw it differently. He read Galatians 3:11, “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, *it is evident*: for, The just shall live by faith.”

He suddenly said, “If I’m to live by faith, then why does everybody tell me that I have to work my way to heaven? I’ve gotta do this and I’ve gotta do that. And I can’t do this, and I can’t do that.”

It eventually rang into his heart that the just shall live by faith, and faith alone. So he came out of the Catholic Church and started The Reformation.

We, as Baptists, were never part of The Reformation. We existed prior to the movement, but he did something that Baptists could not do at that time. He stood up and said, “Catholic Church, you know what? It’s not about works anymore, but it’s about your relationship with Jesus Christ, and him only. It’s not a matter about if my good outweighs my bad, but it’s about the goodness of God.”

The difference between religion and a relationship, the difference between salvation and a false salvation is that one is “do,” and the other is “done!” It rests upon the basis of what Jesus Christ has done on the cross.

I’m using religion in a negative sense today, saying that religion is man’s attempt to get to God, whereas true faith in Jesus Christ is God reaching down to man. When you look at most religions of today, it’s based upon a works system. For example Islam, is all about you bombing a building or performing some kind of work and then maybe you get to go to a place of paradise and have lots of virgins for wives in eternity. Crazy as it sounds, there are many so-called Christian works based systems

Even man-made Christian religions say that if your good (on a scale of one to ten) outweighs your bad, then God will grant you a majority vote on your works and you will go to heaven. That sounds good, but the problem with that is that although many people believe it, it is not what the Word of God says.

The problem with a works-salvation is that it's subjective. That's my first point. It's subjective based upon the person and based upon the culture. In this, what may be wrong for you may not be wrong for someone else. In Africa, they eat monkey brains. I think that should be illegal, amen? I call it gross; they call it a delicacy! The problem with works-salvation is just that: it may be drinking, it may be smoking, it may be caffeine, it may be spitting on the sidewalk. It's relative, depending upon the person.

The standard of what I should or shouldn't do is not based upon me, it's based upon God and his standard. "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1Peter 1:16). Holiness is the standard. Go ahead and try to live as Jesus Christ did perfectly.

Isaiah 64:6 says, "But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our *righteousnesses* are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

Now, I can understand that all the wicked things I ever did are terrible. But Isaiah didn't say that. He says that all of the *good* things we have ever done are as filthy rags. Rags, meaning back then, that the rags were wrapped around leprous skin that was pussing out. You'd take it off and skin and meat and everything would come off with these rags. That's what these "filthy rags" were talking about.

All of our good deeds are as filthy rags compared to the standard of holiness that is required for heaven. It would be like trying to fill up the Grand Canyon with cans of shaving cream. You can tell that I was a good bus kid because I would have tried something like that. But you'd start spraying that that shaving cream and it would then start to evaporate, and it would be an endless process. It can never ever be done!

That's what we see in religion today. People are just squirting religious shaving cream, trying to do all this different stuff, and it's never going to amount to anything in heaven. You ask someone, "Are you going to heaven?"

"Sure!"

"Why?"

"Because I'm a good person!"

"Good as compared to whom?"

"Well, I've never murdered anybody or raped anybody!"

“But that’s not the standard. Are you as holy as God? Do your works match up to God’s?”

Now, the great thing is to look at 2 Timothy 1:9, “Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to *our* works, but according to *his* own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

God has saved us, not according to *our* works, but according to *his* works and the cross of Jesus Christ. **God grades on the cross, not on the curve!**

I loved it when, back in school, everybody failed the test, because that put the blame upon the teacher. It was never *my* fault, it was not because I didn’t study or any of those things. (*Right!*) But I loved it when *everybody* failed because that meant I had a chance that they were going to grade on the curve! The curve is when they do something to help everybody out.

God doesn’t grade upon the curve, but upon the cross. God doesn’t say, “Well, they *almost* got there.” That’s not what the Bible says. God grades upon Jesus bleeding and dying and saying, “It is FINISHED!” It’s not according to my works, but according to his love, his purpose, and his grace.

Now if I have to pick between you and one of my sons, you’re dead meat. If you needed a heart, and my son had a heart, you’re going on to glory. But God sent his only begotten Son to die on the cross for your sins in spite of what you’ve done, whether you’re a serial killer or a pornographer or what. It doesn’t matter. God sent his Son to die for you.

God died for us, not according to our works, but according to his purpose. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

You see, God *knew* that sin would contaminate mankind, and God *planned* to send Jesus Christ. Genesis 3:15 says, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” If there could have been any other way, God would have purposed it. But out of grace, he sent his only begotten Son for me. It’s not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:9).

Galatians 3:24 says, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Works, the law, was never meant to be a means of salvation. It was meant to show that something greater was to come, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can imagine the Old Testament saints saying, “I can’t live this!” And this prepared their hearts for the coming of the Messiah.

The law reveals to us our inability to save ourselves. That’s the first step of salvation. That’s why we preach sin. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

All of our works are filthy rags, no matter how religious we might be. Titus 3:5 says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Romans 11:6 says, “And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” Paul is saying that salvation is only through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That’s the only way you’ll go to heaven! You won’t go to heaven because of your baptism. You won’t go to heaven because you “lived a good life.” It’s not because you tried to do the best you can. It’s not because you turned over a new leaf. It’s only because you came to that spot when you recognized your need and you responded to the Savior.

But you say, what about works? Well, works have a purpose if you do not respond to God's forgiveness, then works are a condemner. Galatians 3:10 says, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

That’s God’s standard, and nobody can say that they did that.

Evangelist Ray Comfort goes up to people and asks them, “Would you say that you are a good person?”

They say, “Yeah. Why?”

Then he asks them, “Well, have you ever told a lie?”

“Well, maybe one.”

He says, “If you commit adultery, that makes you an adulterer. So if you’ve told a lie, then that makes you what?” If they hesitate, he says, “How many lies does it take to make you a liar? It takes one.”

Then he asks them, “Have you ever stolen anything ever?”

They say, “Back when I was a kid.”

He says, “That makes you a thief.”

Then he asks, “Have you ever looked upon a woman with lust?”

They go, “Yeah ...”

He says, “If you’ve looked upon a woman with lust in your heart, then Jesus calls you an adulterer ... But you tell me that you’re a good person.”

They say, “Yeah.”

He says, “But you’ve just admitted that you’re a lying thief and an adulterer at heart. And you’re trying to tell me that you’re really a good person.”

When God convicts us of our need for a Savior and we fail to respond to the Savior, when we say, “I can try to live a good life, I can still try to do the best I can and that will merit me to God,” then what happens is that you’ve come under that curse because you’re doing something that you can never ever fulfill.

How many people say, “Once I clean up my life, then I’m gonna get into church”?

It doesn’t *work* that way! You must come into church and let *God* clean up your life because you’re saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some continue to mask over the real problem. There’s a reason why you can’t do the things that you want to do: because you’ve never truly been saved by the spirit of God.

That’s why Romans 4: 2-3 says, “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”

That is why we see so many people who call themselves Christians, but they’re addicted to the same things that the world’s addicted to: booze by the gallon because they can’t get through the day. As the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:5, they have a form of religion and godliness, but deny the power thereof. The power has never been evident in their life because they’re trusting in something other than Jesus Christ.

If you don’t get saved, then you’re living in condemnation and that will drive you to Jesus (hopefully). But if you harden your heart, it’s going to continue to get harder.

But what about after salvation? I believe “once saved, always saved.” I believe that the Bible teaches that.

Billy Graham has said that he believes that 70-80% of folks in church are unsaved. There’s a difference between knowing of God and knowing Him. You look at people’s works and you know that they’re probably plagued by sin because they’re unsaved.

Romans 6:1-2 says, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” He’s asking, “Shall we go out and sin like the devil to show how effective God’s grace is?” He says, “Forget it!” He says, “How can we that are dead to sin live in it any longer?”

Our works change in that we’re not doing it to earn God’s favor. We’re doing it because God loves us. Works can never take you to heaven, but works can follow you there to meet the Lord. Our works are a fruit of the love that we have for the Lord once we get saved.

There are two sides to works: what we should do and what we shouldn't do. In most churches, the preaching is mostly about what we shouldn't do. I try to preach both sides of the coin, both of what we shouldn't do and what we should.

2 Corinthians 5:14 says, "For the love of Christ constraineth us" to serve him. Then works takes on a new perspective. And it becomes a proof that we truly are saved. We should be able to see both blessings for the good things that we should do and the chastisement for what we shouldn't do. If you've got no chastisement for what we shouldn't do, then I don't care what you say, you're not a child of God.

I don't care how many times you've prayed some sort of prayer. There are folks praying the Rosary every night who have never trusted Christ for their Savior.

There has to be a time in our lives when we come to God in faith for forgiveness of all of our sins. There have been times when I have quit praying for someone to go to church and then I just prayed for them to get saved, because going to church may not do them any good until they get saved. They don't need resuscitation; they need regeneration by the Spirit of God. I don't care how many commitments to Christ my family has made, they must show actual fruit. The Bible says very clearly in Matthew 7:16, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

James 2:18 says, "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." It's not for me to judge whether you're saved or not. It's time for you to look and ask, "Has there ever been a time in my life when God has come into my life and he has begun to change my life? Has there ever been a change in the direction of my outward actions and my inward thoughts?"

2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Is Christ in you? If Christ is inside you, then eventually he is going to be on the outward.

It's like the church sign once that said, "You do the fishing, and God will do the cleaning."

What happens is we quit doing the things that God would have us to do, and we try to mask it over many times with some things that we can do. You may say, "Well, I've been saved, but my fruit's not what it should be. The things I should be doing and the things I shouldn't be doing are not in proper alignment, I know that."

There are some unsaved people who come to this point of fruit inspection and they say, "I need to do more works." But if you're not saved, you can't cover it up. If you're not saved, then you need to get saved. Your danger is that you will go through what Christ warned about in Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." He will say, "I never knew you." He will say that you were workers of iniquity because it wasn't done with the right heart.

If there are areas that I need to work on, I must let him work in my life because not only is it a proof-text of my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but it's one of the markers by which I can tell that I've been saved, and it is also God's plan to change America. It is God's plan to bring glory unto himself.

Romans 8:2-4 says, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Romans says that the law was weak, but now that we've trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, God can work in our lives. Now the works that we, in the flesh, cannot do become a motivator to see God work in our lives in a great and mighty way like he never has before.

That's why Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." We are bought with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

What is it that we have to do? Matthew 22:37-40 says that "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

I don't have time here to go over all of the specifics, but loving God means giving him first place in your life. It's not about you anymore; it's all about him. It's not about what you want to do; it's about loving people, which means giving them the gospel. It means inviting people to special church events like Friend and Family Day, loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.

It's a matter of not going where you used to go and not participating in what you used to do, but really, really having God work in your life.

We are being prepared for a union with Jesus Christ someday. Many of us have false impressions of what heaven will be like someday. Revelations 7:15 says, "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them."

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden. God came down for fellowship in the cool of the day. Heaven is a second Eden without sin. So both Genesis and Revelation shows us that we're going to love and serve and worship God.

Some of my unsaved friends say, "I'm not going to go to heaven. All of my friends are in hell and we're gonna have a big party there." But I wonder what Christians really think that heaven is going to be like.

Jesus said in John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” Now, we like that verse. Give me a cabin here on earth, but I want my mansion up in heaven!

But we’re going to be serving, and there’s going to be no sin there, but we’re going to be serving and worshipping a holy God and obeying him.

This life is but a boot camp for eternity. You go into the military and they say, “Okay, if you can make it in boot camp, then you can make it over in Iraq or Afghanistan. But if you can’t make it in boot camp, then you’re not going.” Because they want someone who’s not going to turn their tail in the middle of the battlefield.

The same is true of God. He prepares us by our learning to obey him by faith from the heart, because serving him is what we’re going to do for eternity.

Does our walk match our talk? It should! If it doesn’t, then we need to ask, “Am I truly saved?”

If we know that we are saved, then what’s our problem? We’re not submitting ourselves to God. He has also empowered you to obey through the Spirit of God.

Maybe there’s something that you’re holding back from God. Maybe it’s bitterness, maybe it’s pain, I do not know. But God promised that you can live a victorious life in Jesus Christ. Either God’s a liar or you’re a liar, and I’m going to take God over you any day. God has given you the power to live a victorious Christian life, but you must submit yourself to him.

If you have never been saved, why don't you get saved today