

# The Bible's Doctrine of Works

*Romans 2:6-11*

## REVIEW

Our text declares a link between works and salvation. Eternal life is for those who show “patient continuance in well doing” and “worketh good” (:7, :10). Eternal wrath is for “every soul of man that doeth evil” (:9). Yet the Bible elsewhere teaches that eternal life is *not* earned by good works and that, in fact, we *all* do evil. How do we explain these apparent contradictions? The short answer is that works serve not as a cause but an evidence of salvation.

### **I. Let's begin with the Bible's doctrine on good works.**

**A. Definition** – Good works are loving, benevolent, generous, and righteous acts of service.

**B. Question 1** – What benefit do good works provide for those wanting to go to heaven?

Answer: None. See Titus 3:5.

**C. Question 2** – How then can a person be saved?

Answer: By faith in Christ alone. See Eph. 2:8-9.

**D. Question 3** – Can good works be added to faith for a person's salvation?

Answer: Faith and works are mutually exclusive. See Rom. 11:6, Gal. 2:21.

**E. Question 4** – Then what's the purpose of giving guidelines for good works?

Answer: Partly to clarify who God is and who man isn't. See Rom. 3:19.

### **II. Why is the Bible's doctrine on good works important?**

**A. At stake is the glory of Jesus Christ** – Phil. 2:8-9

**B. At stake is the integrity of Scriptures** – II Tim. 3:16-17

**C. At stake are precious souls' eternal salvation or damnation** – John 3:36

### **III. Then what's with the (apparent) contradiction of this doctrine in Romans 2?**

A. First note what theology is: the organizing of truth based on the conviction that one infallible Author wrote every word of the Bible and that thus there are no contradictions (II Peter 1:18-21).

1. There are essential truths, and then there are implications, applications, nuances, balancing concerns, clarifying considerations, etc., which are discovered as the whole counsel of God is examined. The abundance of information must be collected and prayerfully organized.

2. Imagine, for example, the doctrinal error one could come up with if he only had the story of Herod's pride and not also the pride of Nimrod, Pharaoh, Jezebel, and Nebuchadnezzar.

B. So let's look at the text.

**:6 – Who will render to every man according to his deeds:**

1. Note first that, in the flow of previous verses, the emphasis is on God's *justice for every man*. This is a statement on that general principle, not a treatise on the way of salvation.
2. The idea is that the rendering will be in accordance with the *facts*. Compare Matt. 7:16-21.
3. The part represents the whole here. “Deeds” includes everything connected with the observable action: desires, motives, thoughts, etc. See Prov. 24:8-12, Matt. 16:24-27, Rev. 20:12.
4. That truth is obvious as we look at the next two verses:

**:7- 8 – To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,**

1. Please note the significance of the phrase “patient continuance.”
  - a. It could not mean that a man's stubborn perseverance *earns* salvation, for that interpretation would contradict the Bible's teaching on works.
  - b. Rather, in keeping with the whole of Scripture, “patient continuance” is not a way of saving someone but proof that one is already saved.
  - c. Continuing good works with good motives is an evidence of redemption. Such is the message over and over again. See for example, Rev. 2:10, Matt. 10:22, Heb. 10:38-39.
2. What about this “seeking” for “glory and honour and immortality”?
  - a. It can't be seeking one's own glory, etc., for that would contradict the call to deny oneself.
  - b. Is there another possible interpretation? Yes! More in keeping with Matt. 6:33!
3. As for those who are “contentious” and obey not the truth but unrighteousness ...
  - a. Know that every sin is a quarrel with God. See Isa. 45:9, Gen. 6:5, Job 24:13.
4. We observe, finally as said in the introduction, that this text explains who goes where forever.

**:8-10 – But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:**

1. Now, why are we given this information? What's the benefit? What's the take-away?
  - a. To be assured of the final, eternal, unavoidable, righteous judgment of God.
  - b. To be (relatively) equipped to help others – II Tim. 4:2
  - c. To examine ourselves to see whether *we* are in the faith. One day the authenticity of our faith will be revealed by examination not of our words but our *deeds*. It would be wise *now* for each of us seriously and severely to examine what we do and why we do it. The Epistle of I John was written to help us to conduct that examination. The following are 10 tests ....

**These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.**  
*I John 5:13*

**1. Love for God**

“We love him because he first loved us.” (I John 4:19)

**2. Love for Scriptures**

“Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” (I John 2:3)

**3. Love for Believers**

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” (I John 3:14)

**4. Hatred for Sin**

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (I John 3:9)

**5. Knowledge of Forgiveness**

“And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” (I John 3:5)

**6. Ongoing Purification**

“We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (I John 3:2-3)

**7. Good Works**

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.” (I John 3:18-19)

**8. Confirmation by the Holy Spirit**

“And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” (I John 3:24)

**9. Awareness of Spiritual Wickedness**

“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” (I John 5:19)

**10. Fellowship with Jesus Christ**

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (I John 5:20)

## **DISCUSSION**

Imagine that a person's passing of these ten tests of authentic salvation was determined by an examination of his deeds. For each of the ten tests, list the deeds that you imagine could indicate true or bogus salvation. Be thorough.