

## Apostle Paul Series – Part 3

# *Works? What's That?*

By Tom Stephens

(Emphasis of any kind are from this writer)

### **The Problem Of Works**

When Apostle Paul taught we cannot do anything toward the completion of our salvation, but only by grace through faith, and definitely not of ourselves—for it is the gift of God—not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:9), was he saying that we cannot live a Christian life by our works? So, what does Apostle Paul say in the next verse?

*“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* (Ephesians 2:10)

**How Can That Be?** The formula is given below, right out of the Epistles. One cannot be saved by works, good deeds of love, or attempting to keep God’s commandments. One must be saved by the grace of God. *The reasoning?* -Check out the references-

- 1) All unsaved persons are spiritually dead (v.1), under the dominion of Satan (V. 2), enslaved to sin, and under the condemnation of God (V.3).
- 2) In order to be saved one must receive God’s provision of salvation (V. 4-5), been forgiven of sin (Romans 4:7-8), be made spiritually alive (Colossians 1:13), be made a new creature in Christ Jesus (V. 10; 2 Cor. 5:17), be delivered from the power of Satan and sin (Col. 1:13), and receive the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:37-39; 20:22).
- 3) Only the Grace of God, through faith will bring salvation to the lost. (vv. 5-8). This Grace includes, **a)** repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 2:38). With this call comes the work of the Holy Spirit within a person, giving him the ability to respond to God. **b)** Those who respond to Christ unto salvation receive additional grace to become born again by His Spirit. Once one receives Christ continue to receive Grace to continue in the Christian life and serve God fully (Romans 8:13-14; 2 Cor. 9:8). God’s grace works within the believer as he further commits himself to work for God’s good pleasure.

So James, in his 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, *and the other Apostles*, teach strongly for the case of works. And Paul is supposedly teaching “no works”, while, at the same time, James is vehemently preaching, “faith without works is dead” However, our works must be based on *faith*, not the *law* (the law is our flesh in violent battle against our faith in Christ). (see James 2)

Seems controversial, doesn’t it? But it is *not* a controversial subject; for by the time we begin to really understand how “works” as is taught in scripture, is manifest in our lives, *I know* we will come to a realistic understanding of God’s word concerning “works” as taught by the Apostles.

Have you ever thought of it like this? When you first knew the Holy Spirit was drawing you to Christ, you knew you had to obey and submit to His perfect power of healing and salvation, didn’t you. In that time of penetration by His Spirit, you knew profoundly that you were not going to wait another second. You would go and sell everything you had—and more if possible—just to find the Pearl of Great Price!

Because of your decision to come when He called, you knew no one, not even your worst enemy could stop you. Nothing on this earth—above or below—could ever have come between you and your eternal salvation. *Nothing*. You also knew that the work completed in you in one moment was supernaturally from Heaven. You had been wholly changed from the inside out. The joy you felt was just as supernatural; and in spite of your prior habits and conditions, you never felt cleaner, lighter and so filled with His love. Yet, the love of Christ Jesus was there to *conform* your dead past to “newness of Life”; and that is when works “in Christ” became very important to you. Right? Absolutely.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul states, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he *is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, *all* things have become new.”

So *now* you are a member of the family of Christ Jesus. No other route can get you in Heaven; and you did nothing physically to receive from your God! There was nothing you *yourself* could have accomplished. You can’t get saved just by attending His house. No works whatsoever will get you and I to heaven, because that would not be possible. Why?

*It’s because every stinking one of our previous works would have been under the Law—in the flesh; and it’s not possible to complete works of faith before you are saved. That would be impossible!*

Jesus said, “*No man can come to the Father except by Me*”. There is no other way we can be saved. However, one kind of works include Christian growth by prayer, fasting, and reading the Words of Jesus. Growing means to grow in the fruits of the Spirit. They are “... love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22-23).

*Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.* How could *that* be? Well, there was *no* law. Yet, to all who had rejected and refused to serve Him, there would be harsh judgment. But because there *was no law*, God only judged *His own people by their faith*; and there’s that word again....*faith*.

### ***Man was judged evil or righteous according to what God had already taught him.***

But in the New Covenant, Paul defines the law as the curse, the flesh, and wrath; and in Romans 4:13-15, he states this, speaking of Abraham in the era prior to circumcision:

“<sup>13</sup>*For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, <sup>15</sup>because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.” <sup>16</sup>*Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*” (My italics).*

To explain, we must go to the days of Abraham. Paul told us that prior to the law, God did not account those who loved Him and completed God’s will in their lives, to be transgressors. Why? Everyone sins—and Abraham’s day was filled with evil—such that Abraham had to ask his wife Sarah, while on His trek to a place where he knew not, to tell men that she was not his wife, but his sister, hoping evil men would not harm him because of Her. *Yet, God did not charge Abraham for lying!* I have found no

place in God's Word that indicated *in any way* that Abraham was ever charged as being unrighteous in any way...even in Hebrews eleven!

**Follow this conversation with me between God and Abimelech:** But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, LORD, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine. (Gen. 20:3-7).—Genesis 20:8-18 follows right now...

**Now, follow this conversation between Abraham and Abimelech:**—<sup>8</sup>Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. <sup>9</sup>Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. <sup>10</sup>And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? <sup>11</sup>And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. <sup>12</sup>And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup>And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother. <sup>14</sup>And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and women-servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. <sup>15</sup>And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee. <sup>16</sup>And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved. <sup>17</sup>So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. <sup>18</sup>For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife. (Gen. 20: 8-18).

There are many types of Christian works *by faith*. And though it be impossible to work *toward* your salvation, *It is not impossible to do all your works of faith after salvation!* They are required.

#### **The Controversy Regarding “To Do Or Not To Do”**

In Galatians 6:14-16, Paul says, *“<sup>14</sup>But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup>And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God”* (my Italics)

*Grace, which is built on the foundation of faith, requires something of All Christians. God requires us to submit, commit fully to His Word, and continue to “walk in His precious Spirit” even to the end.*

The writer of Hebrews penned the following in Hebrews 10:38, 39: “*Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. <sup>39</sup>But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*”

In Romans 4:14-16, Paul said “*For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*” (Romans 4:14-16)

### **Two Kinds Of Works: Of The Law, Or By Hearing Of Faith?**

Again, Paul says this, “*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect in the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal 3:1-5—My italics)*

Paul is saying this: “If you received the Spirit of God (salvation) by the works of the law, then you are not yet a child of God, for the law cannot save you. You must be saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. Yes, I said you cannot be saved by works. *But you can be saved by faith in Jesus Christ’s offer to all kindreds and tongues;* and “good works” come after salvation. Consider this, please:

James, in chapter 2, explains we must be born anew, not by the *law/flesh*, but by the *hearing of faith*. So what is faith? It’s the hearing by the Word of God. That’s the reason Paul is asking the question twice within his teaching found in Galatians 3:1-5. No matter how we look at it, our *good works* unto God should *always be by faith*. Look for other scriptures written by Paul in this form: “...*by the works of the law, or is it by the hearing of faith?*” That’s the answer to Paul’s question above. Now, let’s look at more scripture references:

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. (Gal. 2:16)

He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:5)

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good *works*. These things are good and profitable unto men. (Titus 3:8)

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath *faith*, and have not *works*? can faith save him? (James 2:14)

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 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. (Jas. 2:17, 18)

So, what is faith? It comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God:

● **Romans 4:9**—*Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.*

● **Romans 10:17**—*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

● **Hebrews 11:6**—*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Heb. 11:6)*

So, the difference in our works as Christians and the works prior to salvation is just as Paul taught—“Are these works of the law? *Or, are they of faith?*” I can almost hear him as he ministers this topic: “*You must not do the works by the law; works must be by faith in Christ Jesus.*”

Our works are strongly needful in the kingdom of God; they must be by faith, *not* under the law.

We have much work to do prior to the coming of Christ Jesus. Remember what Jesus said after His Resurrection concerning the Great Commission? He said “Go to the farthest parts of the earth preaching the gospel to each creature, and beginning at Jerusalem, the Holy Ghost will fall upon you and you will do all the same things you were taught while with Me. You will complete the *works* (of faith) that I began—the *works* (by faith) unto the “destruction of the *works* (Of the Law) of the devil”! Following are examples of “faith works”.

Apostle Paul often spoke to the Church words similar to this concerning works, “...*was it fulfilled by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith.*”

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. How could *that* be? Again, there was *no* law until Moses. Yet, to all who had rejected and refused to serve Him, there would be harsh judgment. But because there *was no law*, God only judged *His own people by their faith*; and there’s that word again....*faith*.

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