Limited Atonement?

By Dr. John Hobbs

The third cardinal doctrine in Calvinistic Theology is the doctrine of “Limited Atonement.” It is the “L” in the T-U-L-I-P acrostic. Most Calvinists prefer the term “Particular Atonement” or “Definite Atonement.”

What Calvinists Believe About Limited Atonement

> *The Canons of Dort, article 8, states, ‘It was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and only those, who were from eternity chosen to salvation.’*
>
> *Henry Fish, a Baptist wrote in 1850, ‘Did the atonement, in its saving design, embrace more then the elect? The elect only; for whatever he designed he will accomplish, and he saves only his people from their sins.’*
>
> *David Steele and Curtis Thomas wrote, ‘But He came into the world to represent and save only those given Him by the Father. Thus Christ’s work was limited in that it was designed to save some and not others.’*
>
> *WJ. Seaton said, ‘Christ died to save a particular number of sinners.’*
>
> *Lorraine Boettner said, ‘The value of the atonement depends upon, and is measured by, the dignity of the person making it; and since Christ suffered as a Divine-human person the value of His suffering was infinite … The atonement, therefore, was infinitely meritorious and might have saved every member of the human race had that been God’s plan.’*

> *Ralph Gore wrote, "Christ died for the elect. The extent of the atonement is identical with the intent of divine election."*
>
> *Paul Enns wrote, 'If God is sovereign (Eph. 1:11) then His plan cannot be frustrated, but if Christ died for all people and all people are not saved then God's plan is frustrated.'*
>
> *R. B. Kuiper said, 'God purposed by the atonement to save only the elect and that consequently all the elect, and they alone, will be saved.'*

The question may be put this way: When Christ died on the cross, did he pay for the sins of the entire human race or only for the sins of those who he knew would ultimately be saved? Calvinists would answer the latter group.

> *Wayne Grudem wrote: The term that is usually preferred is particular redemption, since this view holds that Christ died for particular people (specifically, those who would be saved and whom he came to redeem), that he foreknew each one of them individually (cf. Eph. 1:3-5) and had them individually in mind in his atoning work.*

The Foundational Basis for Limited Atonement

The doctrine of Limited Atonement is based on the concept of double jeopardy (trying a person twice for the same crime). The argument goes like this: If Jesus died for the sins of all men, then the sins of all men are paid for and one has already been judged for those sins. On the Day of Judgment, if God would bring a man into judgment and commit him to hell even though Jesus had already paid for his sins, God would be

putting that person in double jeopardy. God would be unjust – something he is not (Deut. 32:4).

The argument is: Since we do not permit double jeopardy in our own legal system, surely we would not expect God to do something we would not do.

Calvinists argue therefore – Jesus actually died only for the sins of the elect, the chosen, the saved.

However, just because there is an analogy from a human viewpoint, this does not prove that it coincides with the truth of God's word.

Isaiah 55:8-9 states, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Proverbs 14:12 states, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." We are warned: "Lean not upon thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

We do not formulate doctrine by analogies or examples. They may illustrate doctrine, but they do not prove doctrine. We must determine truth from the Word of God and not human reasoning. There are some great truths of scripture which are beyond our comprehension and we accept because the Bible teaches them (such as, the Trinity, God's love, nature of sin, and such like), and therefore are not proved by reason, but are known by revelation.

Scriptures Used by Calvinists to Support Limited Atonement

> *Matthew 1:21 states, "For it is he that shall save his people from their sins."*
>
> *Jesus "loved the church and gave himself up for it" (Eph.*

5:25).

Romans 4:25 reads, "Who was delivered up for our trespasses."

Romans 5:8 says, "But God commendeth his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:10 reveals, "We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son."

Romans 8:32 declares, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all."

Acts 20:28 states, "To feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood."

In John 10:15 Jesus said, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "Him who knew no sin he made to be [a] sin [offering] on our behalf."

Galatians 1:4 says, "Who gave himself for our sins."

Ephesians 1:7 says, "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."

Titus 2:14 states, "Who gave himself for us."

Calvinists use the above Scriptures as proof texts that Christ died "only" for the elect.

Christ died for his people. That is the main point of these verses! However the Bible does not teach Limited Atonement – that Christ died "only" for the elect, "only" for a limited class.

Calvinists "twist" and "pervert" other plain Scriptures that clearly teach that Christ died for all men. They do so unto their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:15-17). When we come to the Bible, we must take all of it to arrive at total-saving truth.

Psalms 119:160 states, “The sum of all thy word is truth.” Matthew 4:4 says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” It takes all of Scripture for the man of God to be complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We must preach “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Christ died for all men. Christians appreciate the fact that Christ died for them. The verses used by Calvinists emphasize that point. Unbelievers do not appreciate that fact and therefore do nothing about it.

A True Story Concerning Hebrews 2:9

In 1980, I took second year New Testament Greek through Wheaton College at the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Dallas, Texas. My professor was Dr. John Werner, an outstanding world-recognized Greek scholar. But, he was a Calvinist through and through. One day we were reading the book of Hebrews in class. When it came my time to read, I was to translate Hebrews 2:9. I translated the verse, “But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death *only for the elect.”*

My professor and the class laughed. After the laughter subsided, I added, “Excuse me – that should be – for *every* man.”

Brethren, if the grammar makes sense, anything else is nonsense. To deny that Jesus tasted of death “for every man” is to deny the plain and clear teaching of Scripture! Dr. Werner agreed that the verse should be translated “for every man.” But, he denied that is what it meant. He believed that it meant “every redeemed man” even though that is not what the text says!

We should not base biblical doctrine on “feeling” or “thinking.” Biblical doctrine is based on God’s Word!

If the Holy Spirit wanted to say that Christ died only for the elect, he could have easily done so. But, he did not do so. There is no “specific” passage in the entire Bible that teaches Limited Atonement.

Wayne Grudem, a Calvinist, says, “Hebrews 2:9 is best understood to refer to every one of Christ’s people, every one who is redeemed.”

Grudem is reading the Bible with his rose colored glasses on and sees what he wants to see instead of what is really there! The text does not say that Christ tasted of death for every “redeemed” man. Grudem is reading into the text something that is not there. This is something that God’s Word explicitly forbids (Rev. 22:18-19; 1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:8-9; 3:15; 2 John 9-11; Matt. 4:4; Prov. 30:5-6; Deut. 4:2; 12:32).

The words *every man* in Hebrews 2:9 are translated from the Greek word *pantos* (in form it is a genitive masculine or neuter singular word from the adjective *pas, pasa, pan* meaning “all” or “every”).

Bruce says:

> *So far as the form goes, pantos might be masculine (“everyone”) or neuter (“everything”); but since our author’s concern is with Christ’s work for humanity, and not with cosmic implications of His work, it is more probable to be taken as masculine.*

Alford says, “The singular brings out, far more strongly than the plural would, the applicability of Christ’s death to each individual man.” Jesus died for each individual person (which equals all mankind). The singular *pantos* emphasizes his care and love and concern for every human being!

This fact is a strong factor for each individual person to give his life back to him and live a holy God-fearing life (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

This same Greek word, *pantos,* is found in Matthew 13:19 and is translated "when any one." It is obvious in Matthew 13:19 that the Greek word refers only to lost human beings.

It is interesting that the Greek New Testament uses the word *pantos* at least once specifically to refer "only" to condemned human beings. Calvinists say that the word *pantos* in Hebrews 2:9 refers "only" to saved "redeemed" people. If the word *pantos* in Matthew 13:19 refers only to lost people who will spend eternity in hell, does that mean that in Hebrews 2:9 that the same group is being considered? No!

Can the word *pantos* refer to all mankind including those who appreciate Christ's death for them? Of course! Christ "tasted of death for every man." It is important to understand that the meaning of *pantos* will have to be determined by the context. Therefore, we can conclude that in Hebrews 2:9, the Greek word *pantos* refers to all humans period – not just the saved, not just God's special people. Jesus died for all humans – those who are lost and those who are going to heaven. Calvinists deny the plain teaching of God's Word and add to it when they say Jesus tasted of death for every "redeemed" man.

An Examination of God's Word and Limited Atonement

The Bible is very clear that Jesus died for the sins of "all men" and not just for "the elect."

Consider these passages as to who Jesus died for:

1. John 1:29: "the one that taketh away the sin of the world" – i.e. all mankind

2. John 3:16: “the world” – i.e. all mankind
3. John 4:42: “This is indeed the Saviour of the world” – i.e. all mankind
4. John 12:47: “I came … to save the world” – i.e. all mankind
5. Romans 5:6: “Christ died for the ungodly”
6. Romans 5:8: “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”
7. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: “he died for all”
8. 2 Corinthians 5:19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself” – i.e. all mankind. Those who believe in Limited Atonement say this refers to “the world of the elect.” Again, they are adding to the Word of God.
9. 1 Timothy 1:15: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”
10. Timothy 2:6: “Who gave himself a ransom for all”
11. 1 Timothy 4:10: “Who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe”
12. Titus 2:11: “bringing salvation to all men”
13. Hebrews 2:9: “He should taste of death for every man.”
14. 2 Peter 2:1: “Denying the Master that bought them” – Christ provided redemption for the false prophets but they refused to accept it.
15. 1 John 2:2: “And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.” – i.e. all mankind
16. 1 John 4:14 “The Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” – i.e. all mankind

A Study of 1 John 2:2

One passage that must be the focus of our attention is 1 John 2:2. Here John wrote, “And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.”

Vine defines “propitiation” as “a means whereby sin is covered and remitted.” The text is very clear that sin covering has been provided “for our sins” – that is, Christians’ and “for the whole world,” or all humanity. If there was ever a verse in the Bible that taught the possibility of unlimited salvation – this is it!

Brown says that the word “world” is the “sphere of human beings and of human experience.” The apostle John uses the word “world” several times to refer to all humanity (John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 12:46-47; 1 John 4:14).

It is sad that some people “twist” the scriptures from their true meaning (2 Pet. 3:15-17). The same basis for forgiving one man’s sins is also the same basis for forgiving the sins of all men – the death of Christ.

It is not implied or taught that sins are forgiven unconditionally. The Bible does not teach the doctrine of Universalism, i.e. all men will be saved. The Bible does teach that only those who appropriate the blood of Christ over their sins will be saved (Rom. 6:3-4, 17-18; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rev. 2:10; 7:14).

> *Wayne Grudem, a Calvinist, writes, “The preposition ‘for’ [in 1 John 2:2] is ambiguous with respect to the specific sense in which Christ is the propitiation “for” the sins of the world.*
>
> *The Greek word translated “for” in this verse is peri, and means ‘concerning’ or ‘with respect to.” It does not define the way in which Christ is the sacrifice with respect to the sins of the world.*
>
> *It is consistent with the language of the verse to say that John is simply saying that Christ is the sacrifice available to pay for the sins of anyone and everyone in the world.”*

There are several problems with Grudem's twisting of Scripture:

(1) Grudem does not deal with the word *world* in his defense of Calvinism. It is obvious that John uses the word "world" in the verse and in the other verses cited to refer to all humanity. Jesus died for all mankind.

(2) It is true that the word *for* in the phrase *for the whole world* is the Greek word *peri*. I agree that it means "concerning" or "with respect to."

Robertson says that *pen* has a sense similar to *hyper* in the verse. The word *hyper* means "in behalf of." It must be pointed out that the word *for* in the phrases *for our sins* and *not for ours only* in 1 John 2:2 is translated from the Greek word *peri*.

The Holy Spirit inspired John to use the Greek word *peri* three times in 1 John 2:2. This word is sufficient to define the way Christ is the sacrifice "for our sins" but not "for the sins of the whole world."

Grudem says that the preposition *peri* "is ambiguous." He is straining the gnat and swallowing the camel in order to avoid accepting the clear truth. Grudem would say that its third use in the verse is ambiguous but not its first and second uses.

The emphasis in the verse is on Christ's "propitiation" – not the preposition "for."

John says Christ's propitiation is "for our sins" and "not for ours only" but also "for the sins of the whole world."

A Study of 1 Timothy 4:10

Paul wrote, "For to this end we labor and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of them that believe."

This verse is important to the discussion. Here the apostle clearly states the salvation of all men. He does not teach Universalism. But, he does teach that salvation has been provided for all men, i.e. all humanity. However, that salvation is appropriated and appreciated by those who believe. All men are potentially saved by Christ's death, but only those who appropriate the blood of Christ over their sins will be saved.

Grudem says:

> *He [Jesus] is referring to God the Father, not to Christ, and probably uses the word 'Savior' in the sense of 'one who preserves people's lives and rescues them from danger' rather then the sense of 'one who forgives their sins,' for surely Paul does not mean that every single person will be saved.*

Grudem misses it again.

(1) No, Paul is not teaching that every single person will be saved. No New Testament writer ever taught that.

(2) There is no problem with taking the word *Savior* as referring to God the Father. He is the Savior of all men in that He sent Jesus to die for all men (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). The Father and the Son are one in purpose, aim, plan, and design (John 10:30).

(3) For Grudem to say that the word *Savior* does not refer to "sins" shows his theological bias. In Matthew 1:21, the child is to be called Jesus. Why? Because he will save his people from their "sins." The word "Jesus" means "Savior." Grudem does not want 1 Timothy 4:10 to refer to "sins," so he denies it.

(4) God desires "all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6). Salvation for "all men" has been

provided (1 Tim. 4:10). However, this salvation is “specially” for those who “believe.” This word does not imply that all will be saved. The Greek word *malista* translated “specially” is also translated “particularly” or “especially” in 1 Timothy 5:17 and “above all” or “especially” in 2 Timothy 4:13. Paul is saying that God is potentially the Savior of all men. For the individuals who “will” to come to the Lord, these individuals “will in no wise be cast out” (John 5:40; 6:37).

J.W. Roberts wrote, “He is the savior (potentially) of all men, but especially (or actually) of believers.”

Dr. J. C. Davis states, “God is the potential Savior of all men (John 3:16; Rom. 10:13; 2 Pet. 3:9). God is the actual Savior of believers” (Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 2:10).

J. N. D. Kelly wrote, “Paul is no doubt giving expression to his conviction that the certainty of salvation belongs in an especial degree to those who have accepted Christ.” True!

1 Timothy 4:10 is like Galatians 6:10. Christians are to “work that which is good toward all men and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith.” We have an obligation to do “good toward all men” (even the ones who have not named the name of Christ). But, we have a special obligation to help those who are Christians. Christ died for all men but especially for those who believe.

An Invitation Is Given to All Men

In Matthew 11:25, Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The church, the bride as it is called, and the Holy Spirit perpetuate that invitation as shown by John in Revelation 22:17:

> *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*

The invitation is given to all men. Why offer salvation to all if that is not possible? The text says “whosoever” will.

God Desires All Men to Be Saved

In (2 Peter 3:9) we read:

> *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

God wants “all” to come to repentance! Boettner, a Calvinist, denies that it is God’s plan for all to be saved. Seaton, a Calvinist, asks, “The over-riding question must always be the Divine intention; did God intend to save all men, or did He not?”

The fact that God desires that “all” should come to repentance implies that God has provided provisions for “all.” Christ died for all men. This verse teaches that if a man is lost, it is against God’s will because he wants “all” to come to repentance and be saved.

In 1 Timothy 2:4, Paul wrote, “Who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.” Here again God’s Word is clear. God desires that all men be saved.

In (Ezekiel 33:11) we read:

> *As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

God desires that the wicked turn from his evil ways and live. God does not want or wish that any person be lost.

Paul Enns, a Calvinist, wrote, “If God is sovereign then His

plan cannot be frustrated, but if Christ died for all people and all people are not saved, then God's plan is frustrated."

God is sovereign, but his plan involves the free will of man. His plan is that those who by their free will elect to believe and become obedient will be saved.

God is "frustrated" or "grieved" when men do not respond to his saving grace (Gen. 6:5-6; Mark 3:5; Luke 19:41; Eph. 4:30).

God's desire and will is frustrated when men are lost. God wants "all" to come to repentance and "all men" to be saved. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). "God is not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9).

But, some will perish – not because Jesus did not die for them. He died for each individual person to show his intense love. If an individual is lost, it is because he has rejected God's intense love. God does not desire it that way. But, he respects the right of a person to make his own decision.

Pardon for Sins Can Be Rejected

It is possible for pardon and salvation to be offered and rejected. In 1829 two men, Wilson and Porter, were apprehended in the state of Pennsylvania for robbing the United States mail. They were indicted, convicted, and sentenced to death by hanging. Three weeks before the scheduled execution, President Andrew Jackson pardoned one of the men, George Wilson. This was followed by a strange decision. George Wilson refused the pardon! He was hung because he rejected the pardon.

Today, God has provided eternal salvation and pardon for all men. He has accomplished this by sending his one-of-a-kind Son to die for the sins of each and every individual person. However, this salvation can be refused.

If one chooses not to appropriate the blood of Christ over his

sins initially and continually, he is refusing and rejecting the salvation which has been provided for him by God Almighty. While we can recognize the foolishness of such a decision, we must be aware of the fact that the majority of mankind will refuse their pardon (Matt. 7:13-14; Luke 13:23-24). How sad!

Why Did God Create Man?

A lady asked me, "Why did God create man if he knew so many would be lost?"

This is a thought-provoking question. I answer this with two thoughts:

(1) Whatever God does is right and just. We may not understand what he does but that is because we are human and finite while he is divine and infinite (Isa. 55:8-9). Deuteronomy 32:4 states, "For all his ways are justice: A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he." God himself asked Job, "Wilt thou even annul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be justified?" Job attacked and condemned the present righteousness of God. Job sinned by doing this. Job later repented Job 40:35; 42:1-6).

(2) I think the answer to this tough question is that God respects our free moral agency. If a man is lost, it will be his fault – not God's! God has done everything possible for the salvation of each person. God will not overtake one's will and force him to obey. Life is what we make it! We can avail ourselves of God's love or we can spurn it and reject it. The choice is ours (Deut. 30:11-15; Joshua 24:15; Acts 2:37, 40).

Seaton, a Calvinist, said, "If it was God's intention to save the entire world, then the atonement of Christ has been a great failure, for vast numbers of mankind have not been saved."

Seaton misses it. Christ's death was not a failure. The

failure is man's free moral will. Man by his own free will chooses not to obey. Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9; cf. John 3:36; Rom. 6:17-18; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17).

On the Day of Judgment if a person is cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity, it will be his own failure – not God's! The failure lies with man not with God.

Calvinists say they focus on God's sovereignty while we focus on man's free will. I say it is not an either/or situation; it is a both/and situation. Both of the these concepts are respected in the scriptures. We must accept both.

Conclusion

To deny the Bible teaching that Christ died for all is to make God a respecter of persons – unjust and unmerciful. The doctrine of limited atonement is false. All men are potentially saved. If a person refuses pardon, death is not the fault of the one who offered mercy, but of the one who refused to accept it.

> *(Editor's Note: The word atonement means to cover or conceal. It is an Old Testament word and is not found in the New Testament. The sins of people before the cross could be atoned, but after the cross the sins of the obedient believer were forgiven. There is a dramatic difference. Under Moses there was a remembrance made of atoned sins year by year [Heb. 10:3 – the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins]. The blood of animals could cause God to overlook sins while remembering them year by year, but could not remove the sins. This was atonement. The blood of the Lamb of God is able not to merely cover or bypass sins, but to remove every transgression and disobedience. To receive the forgiveness available in the blood of the cross, one must obey [Heb. 5:7-8].)*

Working the Works of God

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs
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The Bible teaches that works have nothing to do with salvation, and it teaches that works are necessary to salvation.

Still, the Bible does not contradict itself.

How can this be? How can the Bible say two things that seem to be diametrically opposed and yet not contradict itself? It would appear to be self-evident that works cannot be both necessary and unnecessary to salvation.

Since the Bible is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), it must be true and therefore cannot contradict itself. Truth, in order to be truth, must be coherent. If two statements contradict, either one or both of them must be false, but there is no way they can both be true. How, then, do we deal with the fact that the Bible says works are not necessary to justification, and also says that we are justified by works?

Some assume a "take your pick" attitude and go blithely down the path not knowing how to reconcile the two statements — and, possibly, not caring. The honest person however cannot do this and must either reject the Bible or find a logical way to harmonize the two statements.

Various Works

To understand the Bible we must define its terms correctly. It is necessary to understand accurately how Bible writers use the word "works" (sometimes "deeds"), or we will be confused.

A survey of how the Bible uses this word will help us to avoid the confusion of misunderstanding. A failure to understand something correctly leads to incomprehension and perhaps unbelief.

Following is a partial list of “work(s)” mentioned in the Old and New Testaments:

- The work God does – Gen. 2:2; Judges 2:7; Ps. 71:17; 1 Cor. 12:6; John 6:28-29; John 10:37; John 14:10
- The work man does in providing food and shelter – Gen. 3:17-19; Exod. 23:12; Exod. 26:1; Eccl. 2:4; Matt. 21:28
- The work man does in obeying specific commands of God – Gen. 6:13-22; John 9:4; 1 Cor. 15:58
- Work of iniquity (evil) – Ps. 6:8; Ps. 14:1; Jer. 1:16; Ezek. 33:26; Matt. 7:23; Luke 13:27; John 3:19; Rom. 1:27; Eph. 4:19; Rom. 13:12 (“works of darkness”); Gal. 5:19-21 (“works of the flesh”)
- Work of righteousness (good) – Ps. 15:2; Acts 10:35; Matt. 5:16; Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 9:8; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; James 1:4; James 3:13
- Works that are worthy of repentance – Acts 26:20
- The mighty works (signs, miracles) of Jesus – Matt. 11:23-24; John 10:32; Acts 2:22
- Works of the Law of Moses – Rom. 3:20; Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; Gal. 3:2
- Greater works done by Jesus’ disciples – John 5:20; John 14:12
- Good and bad works by which all men shall be judged – Rom. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12-13; Rev. 22:12
- Human works apart from works of God – Rom. 9:11; Rom. 11:6
- Converts to Jesus – 1 Cor. 3:14
- Apostolic signs, and wonders, and mighty works – 2 Cor. 12:12
- Work of sinless perfection – Eph. 2:9; Col. 2:21-23
- The power that works in the saved – Eph. 3:20; Eph. 4:12

- The word of God that works in the believer – 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:10; 1 Tim. 5:12; 2 Tim. 2:21
- Works that justify – James 2:24; James 3:13
- Works of the devil – 1 John 3:8
- The ungodly works of ungodliness – Jude 1:15

This gives a sample of various "works" mentioned in the Bible. It is a mistake to suppose that the word work(s) always refers to condition of acceptance with God. It does not!

Even a casual glance at this list will convince the thoughtful Bible student this is a complicated subject, having many interrelated parts. It is difficult to deal with because of the need to take different relationships or points of view into consideration.

The mighty acts of Jehovah are works. Creation (Ps. 8:3-6; Ps. 19:1; Ps. 33:4; Ps. 92:5; Ps. 102:25; Ps. 104:24), redemptive acts in history like the Exodus (Judges 2:7-10).

Jesus is our perfect example in all things (1 Pet. 2:21). The Savior went about doing good (Acts 10:38-39; John 4:34; John 5:36; John 10:25-38; John 15:24; John 17:4). His words and his works confirmed his authority and mission.

Humans are sinless at birth, seeing that Jehovah is the Father and Giver of the human spirit (Heb. 12:9; Eccl. 12:7). As the child matures it comes to understand that some things are right and other things are wrong, but chooses to do wrong things and ignore right things. This is called sin – sin of omission and sin of commission. This is the something a person knowingly does to himself. Iniquity separates a soul from its God (Isa. 59:2). Those who die in sin cannot go where Jesus is; they "shall not inherit the kingdom of God (John 8:21; Gal. 5:19-21).

In his infinite compassion Jehovah sent Jesus to offer himself sacrifice for sins (John 3:16; John 10:18; Matt. 26:28).

We access the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb of God through belief (John 8:24).

“They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28-29).

Saving belief is a work that includes other works. Faith is shown by works (James 2:18). “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). Abraham was justified by works produced by faith (James 2:21-22). Works make faith perfect (James 2:22). Sinners are justified by works and not by faith only (James 2:24). Faith without works is dead (James 2:26).

Jesus said, “He that believeth (a work) and is baptized (a work) shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (James 2:22). In baptism the sinner, “is buried with Christ” and is “raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12). In baptism we are buried “with” Christ and we are raised “with” him believing that God will keep his promise to save “he that believeth and is baptized.” Peter tells us that baptism saves (1 Pet. 3:21). In baptism our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16).

The spirit that is born again in the water of baptism (John 3:5) enters the kingdom of God, where faith continues to work, bringing glory to God (Matt. 5:16). The saved “work the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 16:10), abound “in every good work” (1 Cor. 9:8). Servants of righteousness “end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:5). The child of God is “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph. 2:10); the saint is “fruitful unto every good work” (Col. 1:10). The Christian “works out his own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). Paul prayed that God the Father may “comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2 Thess. 2:17). Women professing godliness are to adorn

themselves “with good works” (1 Tim. 2:10). If a man desires the office of bishop, he desires “a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). Widows to be enrolled are to be “well reported of for good works” (1 Tim. 5:10). The new covenant lauds the good works of some that are “evident, and cannot be hid” (1 Tim. 5:25). Those described as “a vessel unto honor” are “prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21). “The man of God” is “furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). Preachers are to be “an ensample of good works” (Titus 2:7), “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). Followers of Jesus are to “be ready unto every good work” (Titus 3:1). Paul desired “that they who have believed God may be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister” (Heb. 6:10). “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). Our Lord Jesus “make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:21).

The “wise and understanding among you? let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). Behave seemly among the pagans, “that, wherein they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12). “My Little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth (1 John 3:18). Jesus knows and commends the works of his disciples on earth (Rev. 2:2, Rev. 2:9, Rev. 2:19; Rev. 3:8). Those who die in the Lord are blessed because “their works follow with them” (Rev. 14:13).

On the last great judgment day, God will render unto every man “according to their works, whether they be good or evil” (Eccl. 12:14; Rev. 20:12-13; Rev. 22:12).

It is because of a present and future judgment that we must

avoid the works of the flesh … the works of darkness … the works of the devil. Abstaining from all evil works is critical to the believer.

In the light of what the new covenant has to say about the importance of good works – works of faith – works that justify (James 2:24) – it seems strange that anyone would say that works have nothing to do with salvation … unless, of course, he is blinded by denominational dogma.

The Bible does warn us that we cannot live to maturity and be sinless (Rom. 3:27; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 4:2-6). "All sin and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). It also tells us the works of the Law of Moses cannot save us (Rom. 9:32; Gal. 2:16; Gal. 3:10). If eternal salvation could come by the Mosaic Law, then the death of Jesus was needless, because the people had that law for 1,500 years before Jesus was born of a woman (Gal. 2:21). We are also told that we cannot save ourselves by austerities (Col. 2:18).

Some honest person may be misled into wrongly supposing that when the Bible tells us we cannot be saved by our own works because it is not possible for us to live without sin – sooner or later all will sin and fall short of God's glory, that it is saying that even works of faith and righteousness – works of God – do not save. Also some will read Bible passages which say that the works of the Law of Moses cannot save, and mistakenly conclude that works have nothing to do with salvation. This study should clear that up because it gives indisputable proof that there is no justification without works.

It is indisputably true that works are necessary to justification (James 2:24), but it is also true that some works cannot save – the work of living a perfectly sinless life – the work of devising our own scheme of redemption – the works of the Law of Moses – the works of darkness, which are the works of Satan.

So, it is true that works both save us and have nothing to do with our salvation, depending on what kind of works you are talking about.

It is not possible for a reasonable adult to be sinless and therefore, in this sense, one cannot save himself by his own works. We cannot be saved by the works of Satan, nor by the works of the Law of Moses, nor by any human invention. Such works have no power to save and many of them are an offense to God.

Still, it is true that the work of faith (the works produced by faith, see Rom. 1:5; Rom. 16:26), bring the sinner into a right relationship with his Creator, help to maintain that relationship, and will one day be the reason for his promotion to glory (Matt. 25:31-46). To say that works have nothing to do with salvation is to fly in the face of Bible teaching.

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