

Are good works required to receive salvation? By “works”, we mean things we do that would somehow lead us to earn salvation on our own.

The answer is “no”, and there are at least two (though not mutually exclusive) problems we’ll look at as to why we’re not saved by our own works:

- There are logical problems.
- Scripture contradicts salvation by works.

First, looking at things from a logical perspective and trying to reason things out, there are several logical problems for why salvation by works doesn’t work. If you understand what we’re being saved from - death, judgment for our sins, and our sinful nature - it becomes clear that there’s not really a way for our works to save us from these things. Human experience and history shows that saving ourselves from death and our sinful nature has been impossible by our own efforts (while people may try to prolong their lives, there doesn’t seem to be any serious effort for people to actually avoid death outside of religion; and no one but Jesus Christ has been able to completely conquer sin in the flesh and live a sinless life). To be saved from judgment/punishment of our sins would require pleasing God in a way to meet His standards - otherwise, God’s justice would be violated. And we know that since all have sinned (apart from Christ), there’s no way we can meet God’s perfect standards. These are also backed up by Scripture (Romans 3:20-23, Romans 8:3, Hebrews 7-10). Finally, if we look at *how* God saves us, we can logically see how He is able to and does save us - He’s needed to solve this salvation puzzle and make it work.

Second, Scripture abundantly states that we are saved by God’s grace through faith, not by our works:

- For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. - Romans 3:28 (ESV)
- And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, - Romans 4:5 (ESV)
- yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. - Galatians 2:16 (ESV)
- Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” - Galatians 3:11 (ESV)
- For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)
- and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— - Philippians 3:9 (ESV)
- who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, - 2 Timothy 1:9 (ESV)
- he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, - Titus 3:5 (ESV)

Furthermore, if works are required to be saved as a separate or additional requirement to faith, then Christ’s work and sacrifice were in vain (Romans 4:14, Galatians 2:21). When Jesus was asked about the works of God, He replied that the work of God is to believe in the one he has sent (John 6:28-29). So if there is any “work” we have to do, it’s this belief, this faith, in Christ as the way to be saved.

There are some passages of Scripture that may come up that may seem to suggest that works are required from us (potentially in addition to faith) for salvation. The most common one is from James 2:14-26. This is a bit tricky, but some thoughts/resources are below:

- Paul and James are writing to different audiences and may have different items to address from slightly different perspectives.
- A given word may have multiple meanings (for example, “faith” and “justify” in this section). This isn’t unique to English or just translation issues, but is true of the original Greek as well. Thus we should seek the intended meaning of the author, and context can be helpful here.
- When James is talking about the insufficient version of “faith” here, he seems to have a few specific things in mind:
 - Someone “saying” or “claiming” they have faith without any works (James 2:14, 18).
 - The faith here is of no good - it is dead, useless (James 2:14, 16-17, 20, 26).
 - There’s a notion of belief simply being an acknowledgement of God’s existence as God (James 2:19).
- Just before these verses, James makes it clear that whoever sins in just one instance is declared guilty, but James’ audience should be under the “law of liberty” (James 2:10-12).
- We see in these verses that there is a meaning of faith that James has in mind that is saving faith. And works are a way that this faith can be shown, evidenced, or demonstrated.
- At least part of what James seems to be countering is the idea that “faith” and “works” can be completely separated or viewed independently. The close relationship between these ideas culminates in verses like James 2:22 and 2:26. Because of how these things are tied together (see next bullet point), it can be an error to try and completely separate them.
- In short, what James is getting at is that the faith of one who is saved will result in good works. One who has truly placed faith in Jesus Christ for salvation is recipient of all the promises that entails, which includes transformation into a new life in the Holy Spirit that naturally produces good works.
- The idea that we are saved [in part] so that we can do good works is supported by other Scripture (Romans 7:4-6, Galatians 5:6, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 2:12-13, Titus 3:8, 1 John 2:3-6).
- For additional reading, see:
 - <https://carm.org/are-we-justified-faith-romans-or-works-james>
 - <https://www.gotquestions.org/salvation-faith-alone.html>
 - <https://www.gotquestions.org/faith-without-works-dead.html>
 - <https://www.gotquestions.org/faith-alone.html>
 - <https://www.str.org/articles/faith-and-works-paul-vs.-james>
 - <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/faith-and-works/>
 - <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/does-james-contradict-paul>
 - <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-14-salvation-grace-through-faith-alone-ephesians-28-9>
 - <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-15-salvation-and-good-works-ephesians-210>
 - *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*
 - *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle of James*
 - *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter of James*
 - *James: An Introduction and Commentary*
 - *The Message of James*
 - *Faithlife Study Bible*
 - *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*
 - *The Letters of James and Peter*
 - *Theology of the New Testament, Volume Two: The Variety and Unity of the Apostolic Witness to Christ*