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By Rebecca Brimmer, *International President and CEO*

DO OUR ACTIONS

MATTER TO GOD?



Living in Israel has given me the opportunity to be exposed to different ways of thinking. The relationship between faith and works (or grace and works) is one area where Jews and Christians seem to think differently. Our Orthodox Jewish friend, Moshe Kempinski, has expressed to us on more than one occasion the uncomfortable conversations he has with Christians who, in trying to convince him of the better way of Christianity, denigrate Judaism as an inferior religion of laws or works. Moshe insists that they misunderstand his motives. He doesn't keep the laws of the Bible because he is trying to earn his salvation or is afraid of God's punishment if he doesn't; rather Moshe tells us he keeps the commandments of the Bible because he loves the Law-Giver or, as he refers to God, the Beloved.

Brad Young, the Christian author of many books relating to the Jewish roots of Christianity, tells the Jewish parable of a king who went on a trip leaving two servants in charge of his estate. One of the servants loved and feared his master, the second only feared his master. The one who loved and feared took great care of his half of the estate so that when the king returned he was well-pleased. The one who only feared neglected the estate. Young concludes, "The servant who has the proper faith in God, based upon reverence and love, works diligently to win divine approval through dedicated service. Fear without love is not enough. Those who love the king will obey his commandments and seek to please him in their daily lives."

*Fear
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SALVATION BY GRACE OR WORKS?

I am so thankful for the graciousness of God to extend salvation to me through Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah as a free gift. And I am not alone! Certainly as Christians we believe that salvation is not obtained through any of our own works! It is a gift of God that we receive through believing in Yeshua and accepting Him as our savior. The Apostle Paul said it clearly, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Eph. 2:8–9). This is one of the theme verses of Christianity and like me, you may have memorized it as a child. Yet, I am increasingly coming to think that some in Christendom have taken the idea of the free gift of salvation and the marvelous grace of God to an extreme that was not intended by God—treating it like a free pass to behave as we like.

The next verse in Ephesians 2 says this: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (Messiah Yeshua) for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Eph. 2:10 emphasis added) WAIT...what is that about **good works**? Didn't Paul just say that it is **NOT OF WORKS**? Certainly I never memorized verse 10. Why not? What are we missing?

Paul was a Jewish man, who was called the Apostle to the Gentiles. As a Jewish person, he was raised to believe in the importance of righteous action. Even today, we see that our Jewish friends emphasize the importance of good works in their daily life. Can we learn something from them about Paul's meaning?



DO JEWISH PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THEY EARN SALVATION?

As mentioned at the beginning of this teaching, Christians often assume that Jewish people are trying to earn salvation by keeping the Law. Is that the case?

In the book *Our Father Abraham* Dr. Marvin Wilson addresses the subject saying, *“There is a common belief in today's Church that Judaism...teaches salvation by works of the Law, whereas Christianity is a religion of grace.”* Wilson proceeded to quote Carl D. Evans, who said, *“to the extent that we [the Church] propagate this*

view in our preaching and our teaching, we are guilty of bearing false witness.” Wilson also quotes Pinchas Lapide, a Jewish scholar of New Testament studies, “The rabbinate has never considered the *Torah* [Gen.–Deut.] as the way of salvation to God...[we Jews] regard salvation as God’s exclusive prerogative, so we Jews are the advocates of ‘pure grace.’” Pinchas also stressed that all masters of the *Talmud* (rabbinic commentary on Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Scriptures) teach that salvation could be attained “only through God’s gracious love.” In my conversations with many Jewish people I have also come to realize they do not view keeping the Law as a means of salvation, but rather as the way a person in covenant with God behaves. In other words, because they are in covenant with God, they should act in the way God has prescribed for them in the *Torah*.

I have come to realize that, by and large, neither Christians nor Jews believe that they can earn salvation or covenant relationship with God. Both believe that salvation is a gift from God. That is not meant to imply that they have total agreement—of course there is a major disagreement about the identity of the Messiah.



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WHERE DOES RIGHTEOUS ACTION ENTER THE PICTURE?

So, what about works? What does God expect of us? Do our actions matter? Jewish author William Silverman wrote, “Belief and moral action are indivisible. It is not enough to believe without manifesting belief through our deeds.” Another much earlier Jewish author wrote similarly, “*Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works...For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*” (James 2:17–18, 26). My father, Dr. David Allen Lewis, used to paraphrase James saying, “Belief without action is deception.” If I were to summarize these statements, I would say that if I really believe something then my actions will reflect that belief.

LACK OF LOVING AND FEARING GOD IMPACTS OUR WORLD

Over the past few decades it seems that fewer people honor, fear and love God. The advent of the theory of evolution weakened the bonds men had with their creator. If there is no creator, as evolution theorizes, then there is no need to keep His laws, to honor Him by attending church, reading the Bible, praying, etc. As time has gone by, we have witnessed an increase in lawlessness.

It is shocking to see the changes our world has experienced in the past few decades. As a child I remember running freely though the neighborhood, climb-

ing trees, making forts, playing tag and not just in a safe fenced-in backyard. We roamed and ran, and nobody worried that we would be snatched! We had parameters like: only go so far, after you do your chores, and show up at dinnertime! I remember how shocking it was that the movie *Gone with the Wind* contained a swear word. Today, it would probably be considered a G-rated movie. Abortion, pornography, murder, degradation and vice have become commonplace in our modern society.

Sadly, even within the Church we find many who have relaxed their standards. I have heard Christians recommend a movie saying there wasn't much swearing and only one nude scene, a statement that would have totally shocked Christians 50 years ago. Sin within the Church also seems to have become more prevalent. We are saddened when Christians are caught in immorality, but we are not surprised. It seems that many are relying on the unmerited favor and grace of God to save them in spite of their actions. Paul addressed this when he said, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*" (Rom. 6:1-2)

Have we lost the fear of the Lord?



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GRACE—AN ANALOGY

In thinking about grace in the life of the believer, I am reminded of the high wire act at the circus. For the purpose of my analogy, the athletes symbolize believers who have been invited (gift of salvation) to join the troupe (God's family). After joining the group they learn the routines, they practice and discipline their bodies with proper food and exercise. When people go to see their act, they watch the athletes climb a ladder that reaches

to the heights of the tent and are astonished at their feats high overhead. It is not grace that keeps them on the wire—rather it is the discipline of exercise, of many hours of practice that enables them to walk the wire. Grace is the net underneath the wire. If they fall, they will not be killed because they are caught in the net. Yet surely the aim of the athlete is to stay on the wire—to successfully complete the act. The highest gain comes from faithfully finishing the act. Yet, how thankful they are if, when they miss the mark, the net of grace is there to rescue them.

THEOLOGICAL RE-THINKING

I recently ran across a blog by Brandan Robertson, entitled “4 Teachings of Jesus That His Followers (Almost) Never Take Seriously.” As a disclaimer, let me say that I have only read this one article by Robertson and do not know him either personally or by reputation. He describes himself as a millennial (young adult), Christian writer, activist, and speaker who seeks to build bridges across cultural, theological and political divides.

As I read this article I sensed a search for truth. I found point two quite interesting and have printed it below unedited:

#2 The only way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is through DOING the will of God.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”
Matthew 7:21 ESV

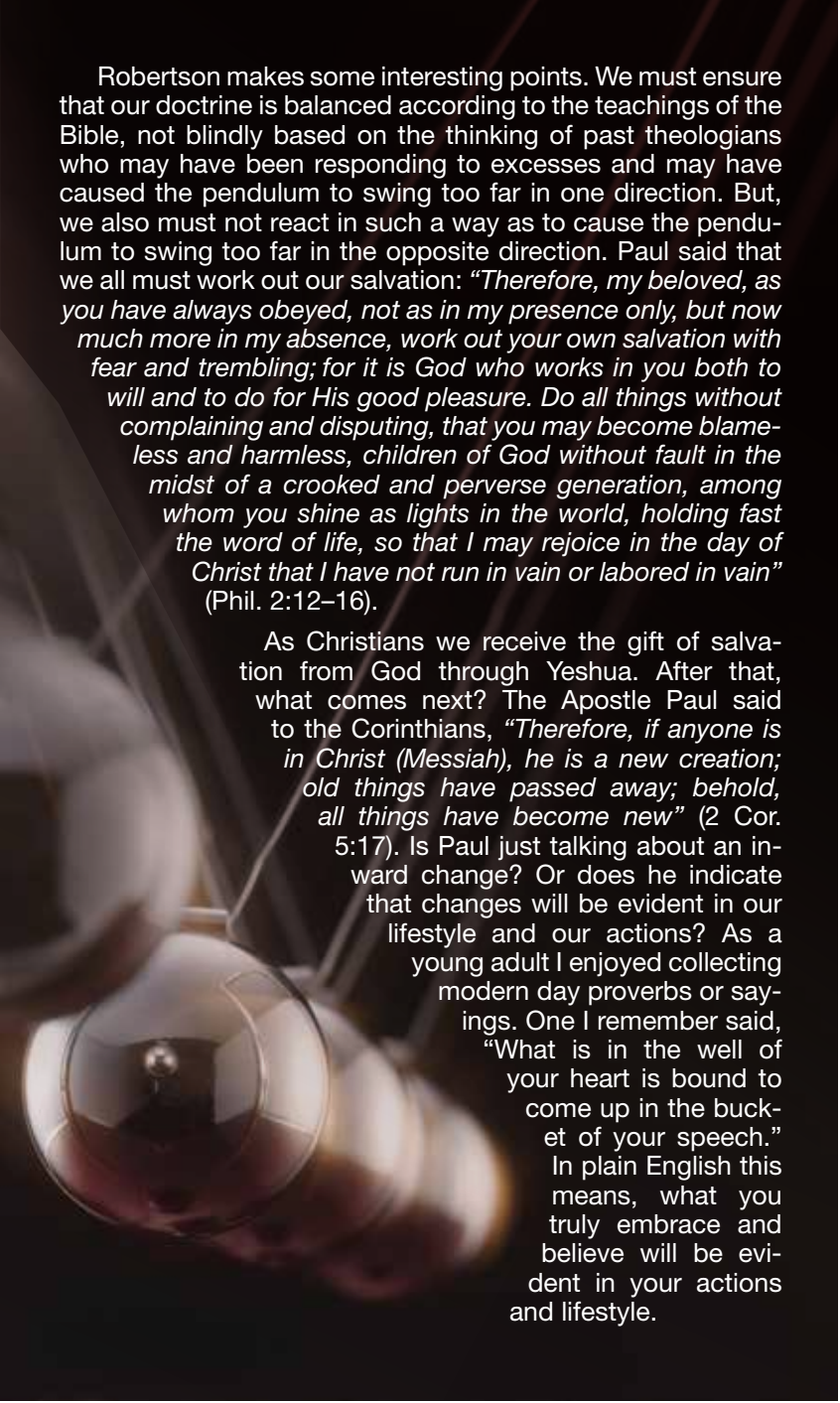
“An expert in the law stood up to test Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘What is written in the law?’ He asked him. ‘How

do you read it?' He answered: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' 'You've answered correctly,' He told him. 'Do this and you will live.'" Luke 10: 25–28 HCSB



“We are saved by faith alone, apart from works! This is a very popular Protestant catch phrase. The doctrine of *sola fide* (faith alone) was developed by the Reformers in response to the Roman Catholic Church’s corrupted teachings that emerged in the 16th Century teaching that one could gain favor with God and shave off years in Hell and Purgatory by giving money to the church or doing acts of penance. The intention of the doctrine of *faith alone* was very good—to correct the error that our salvation could be earned or that God’s grace could be manipulated. But like most doctrines that are formulated *in response* to another group’s doctrine, it often goes too far.

“One of the clearest teachings throughout all four Gospel accounts is that the way to enter the Kingdom of God is through living in obedience to the Law of Christ. Time and time again, Jesus makes very clear statements that condemn those who think that they will be saved because they believe the right things or do the right religious rituals. Jesus responds to people who believe they are religious and deserve heaven by saying that their outward religiosity is detestable to God and the only thing God desires is that they would exercise their faith by obeying the command of God—to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly (Micah 6:8). Jesus says if anyone claims to be right with God but doesn’t serve the poor, needy, oppressed, marginalized, sick, diseased, and sinful, then they do not have a relationship with God. No matter what they proclaim with their lips. No matter how religious they may appear. Jesus says those who don’t obey will have no part in his Kingdom. He makes very clear that the way to ‘inherit eternal life’ is through loving God and loving our neighbor. Isn’t it astonishing, then, how many Christians today have been taught that salvation comes through right believing instead of right practice—a message that is fundamentally contrary to the words of Jesus. (And even more to his little brother James who says, ‘You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.’ James 2:24 ESV)”



Robertson makes some interesting points. We must ensure that our doctrine is balanced according to the teachings of the Bible, not blindly based on the thinking of past theologians who may have been responding to excesses and may have caused the pendulum to swing too far in one direction. But, we also must not react in such a way as to cause the pendulum to swing too far in the opposite direction. Paul said that we all must work out our salvation: *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain”* (Phil. 2:12–16).

As Christians we receive the gift of salvation from God through Yeshua. After that, what comes next? The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ (Messiah), he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Cor. 5:17). Is Paul just talking about an inward change? Or does he indicate that changes will be evident in our lifestyle and our actions? As a young adult I enjoyed collecting modern day proverbs or sayings. One I remember said, *“What is in the well of your heart is bound to come up in the bucket of your speech.”* In plain English this means, what you truly embrace and believe will be evident in your actions and lifestyle.

Certainly we have all known people who were radically changed after accepting the gift of salvation. I believe that the Writings of the Apostles (NT) show that both faith and works should mark a normative believer's life.

FAITH AND WORKS

Yeshua said, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matt. 5:16 emphasis added).

When Yeshua was asked to define the greatest commandment, He replied, *“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these”* (Mark 12:29–31).



*Let your
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Matt. 5:16*

Yeshua was quoting from Leviticus 19:18 when He said we were to love our neighbors. Jewish commentator Abraham Chill gives two points about this Scripture:

1. Our sages are almost unanimous in their agreement that the biblical commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” is the basic pillar upon which the entire *Torah* is built.
2. The observance of this law includes such “good deeds” as visiting the sick, arranging for the burial of the dead, comforting the bereaved, providing dowries for poor brides, and protecting the possessions of another as if they were his own.

As I read that list I thought about the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25) when Yeshua speaks about the judgment of the nations. He says that He will divide them into two groups: those who will inherit the kingdom prepared for them

from the foundations of the world and those who will be cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. What are the criteria? Feeding the hungry; clothing the naked; visiting the sick and prisoners; giving water to the thirsty; providing hospitality to strangers. The passage closes by saying, *“Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Matt. 25:45–46).

Most Christians believe that Matthew 24–25 is for the end times—perhaps these very times we are living in. However, Yeshua, our savior, spoke these words in the first century, in a Jewish environment, as a Jewish itinerate teacher to His Jewish disciples. He was not speaking to Gentiles—that came later. Nonetheless, we see that Yeshua felt that actions were important. Was it really His plan that His followers in subsequent generations and locations would not see the importance of good works?

Perhaps some may disregard these statements of Yeshua because He said them before His redemptive work on the cross. They may prefer to quote Paul. So, let’s look at what Paul said about righteous action.



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PAUL ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD WORKS

2 Thessalonians 3:13

*“But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in **doing good.**”*

Colossians 1:9–11

*“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being **fruitful in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.”*

Titus 2:7, 12–14

*“In all things showing yourself to be a **pattern of good works**; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility... teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, **zealous for good works.**”*

Titus 3:1, 8, 14

*“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for **every good work**... This is a faithful saying, and these things I want to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain **good works**. These things are good and profitable to men... And let our people also learn to maintain **good works**, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”*

JAMES & JOHN

James wrote a treatise on the subject of the inter-relationship of faith and works. You will find it in James 2:14–26.

1 John 2:3–5

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”



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1 John 3:16–18

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

APPLY THE TRUTH

I am so thankful to be called a child of God, to have received the gracious gift of salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Yeshua. But, I realize His gracious gift is not an invitation to lie back on the chaise lounge of grace and bask in His love. Rather it is an invitation to journey with Him through life, gaining the disciplines of righteous living, constantly striving to live the life abundant that He has invited me to join. I still must work out my salvation, reaching for the prize of the high calling of God in Messiah Yeshua. Is it possible that we have been looking at the whole issue in an adversarial fashion? That it is not faith or works—it is Faith **and** Works! May God help us to be people of great faith doing great works for the Lord as we allow His light to shine through us piercing the darkness that threatens to envelop our world.

FAITH & WORKS

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