

The Bottom-Line Guide to Mormonism

Part 9: The Latter-day Saint View of Faith and Works

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On no other subject do evangelicals and Mormons misunderstand each other more than on faith and works. Mormons commonly accuse evangelicals of thinking that mere verbal or mental agreement with the gospel is sufficient for salvation, resulting in a license to sin. On the other hand, evangelicals commonly accuse Mormons of believing that they are saved by doing good works, in effect leaving no place for grace. The typical LDS perception of the evangelical view is a caricature while the typical evangelical perception of the LDS view is overly simplistic.

To understand fully the LDS view of faith and works, one must put these issues in the broader context of the LDS view of salvation (discussed in Part 8 of this series). Mormons believe that virtually everyone will be “saved” in a general sense. This *general salvation* is resurrection from the dead to live forever in one of three heavenly kingdoms. This salvation could be described as “by grace” in the sense that God grants it as a gift to virtually everyone. Everyone except the “sons of perdition” (a few individuals who received direct revelations of the truth and yet rejected it) will be resurrected and receive *immortality* (physical life that will never die). ***Neither faith nor works is required for this general salvation.*** You can be an atheist and a murderer and still get it (although such individuals will undergo a temporal punishment first).

Evangelical View of Faith and Works	LDS View of Faith and Works
No sinner will be saved apart from faith	A general salvation will be given to everyone whether they have faith or not
God’s grace makes godly living possible	Godly living is required to receive God’s grace
Good works are the fruit of salvation	Good works are the precondition of salvation

Mormons also affirm an *individual salvation* of life in the highest, “celestial” kingdom. Only those who go there will live with Heavenly Father and Mother. ***Both faith and works are required for this individual salvation.*** The LDS requirements for this salvation include:

- belief in Christ
- baptism (into the LDS Church)
- keeping all the commandments (including rules laid down by the LDS Church)
- receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost (by a Mormon laying hands on you)
- dependence on Christ’s Atonement and God’s grace to make you perfect

According to the Book of Mormon, “we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). The LDS Church understands this verse to mean that God’s grace helps believers only after they have exerted every effort throughout their lives to fulfill all of their religious and moral obligations. As the Book of Mormon also says: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and *if* ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, ***then*** is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32, emphasis added). In short, one must not only believe in Christ, but one must do everything one can, becoming as close to perfect as possible, and then and only then will grace make up the

difference. Grace, according to Mormonism, is a spiritual power that will help us to become perfect, but we have to make every effort first to do everything we can do.

2 Nephi 25:23 stands in obvious contrast to the Apostle Paul's statement, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9 KJV). Grace, according to Paul, is not a spiritual power that helps people who do good works to become perfect, but instead is God's undeserved favor in giving people eternal life instead of the eternal death their works deserve. Salvation is "not of works" because none of us can make ourselves right with God based on our works (Rom. 3:19-20, 23). In this respect, there can be no compromise between salvation by grace and salvation by works: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace" (Rom. 11:6 KJV). The whole point of grace is that God makes people right with him who do *not* perform the works that would be required to justify themselves (Rom. 4:5).

Biblically speaking, there is only one salvation: deliverance through faith in Christ from the wrath of God that all sinners justly deserve (John 3:36; Rom. 5:9; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). There is no salvation to lesser heavenly kingdoms for sinners who do not repent and who do not trust in God's mercy; all people face either eternal punishment or eternal life (Matt. 25:46).

Mormons are by no means alone in misrepresenting what evangelicals believe about faith and works. A complete statement of the evangelical position includes the following four points:

- (1) God saves us **by grace alone**, not by works (Rom. 11:6). We cannot save ourselves.
- (2) God saves us **in Christ alone**: he is the only Savior (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).
- (3) God saves us **through faith alone** (Rom. 3:26-28; Eph. 2:8-9). *Faith* does not mean mere lip profession or mental agreement with the facts of the gospel. Anyone whose so-called "faith" is just mental or verbal agreement is still lost. Rather, true faith means *trusting* in God, a humble attitude of dependence on God's grace and mercy bestowed on us in Christ.

- (4) God saves us **resulting in good works**. Immediately following Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul adds, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **unto good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10 KJV). Grace does not kick in to save us after we do all the good works we can, as Mormonism teaches. Rather, our good works kick in after God's grace saves us. Good works are *the fruit, not the root*, of salvation. The Christian life is the *result* of God's grace (John 1:16-17; Acts 18:27; 20:24; Rom. 3:24; 5:15-21; Eph. 1:19; 2:5-10; Phil. 1:6; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 4:16; 1 Pet. 1:5). The evangelical view of salvation does not give Christians a license to sin. Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, was quite clear on this point: "For if works and love do not blossom forth, it is not genuine faith, the gospel has not yet gained a foothold, and Christ is not yet rightly known" (*Preface to the New Testament*, 1522).

Mormons who are honest with themselves will have to wonder how they can claim to have done "all [they] can do" (2 Nephi 25:23). Unless they can sincerely make that claim—and who has done everything they could?—the Mormon promise of grace does not apply to them. For them, the biblical gospel is indeed good news. God is not waiting for you to do your best before he steps in to do the rest. Rather, God has sent *his* "best"—his only Son—to save us (John 3:16) despite our failure—really, *because of* our failure—to do our best. If we throw ourselves on his mercy and trust only in him for our place in his eternal kingdom, God accepts us on that basis. Secure in God's love, forgiveness, and acceptance, we are free to do good works as the "fruits of thankfulness" (Heidelberg Catechism) for all God has done for us in Christ.

For information on salvation by grace for Mormons visit: irr.org/mit/salvation.html.

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