“Why Would It Not Be Better to be Measured by One’s Works Instead of Free Grace?”

Why would it not be better to be measured by one’s works instead of free grace?

Thanks for asking. Interesting question.

I think a clear understanding of our works and of grace would bring clarity to the difference.

What do we bring to the table in terms of our works? Consider what Paul wrote in Romans 7:18–”I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

Consider Isaiah 64:6–”all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”

And it’s not just that our works fall short of a high standard . . . it’s that sin has so thoroughly corrupted our nature that even our most sincere, well-intentioned acts are tainted at the root. The problem isn’t just what we do but what we are. A glass that contains poison doesn’t become safe because you pour something good into it, because the contents are compromised from the start. This is why even the most moral, sincere, generous, religiously devoted person cannot earn a right standing before God on the basis of their character or effort. We generally underestimate the impact of sin. It’s not just a blemish on what might be an acceptable record; it’s a disqualifying condition. Whatever good we attempt to do still flows through a fallen nature, mixed with impure motives, self-interest, and pride we often can’t even detect in ourselves. God, who sees not just actions but the heart behind them, cannot receive that as righteousness.

Consider what Jesus Himself said in John 15:5—”Apart from Me, you can do nothing.”

The very best we have to offer in our own strength and from our own efforts to a holy and perfect God counts as nothing. He is not impressed.

Compare our works to God’s grace: perfect, holy, favor and blessing and empowering we don’t deserve. He pours His supernatural life and divine energy into us! He gives us the privilege of loving Him and serving Him and others with His own power. I like to think of the difference between the power of a tiny hearing aid battery . . . and the power of the sun. That’s the beginning of the distinction between our own puny human efforts and God’s unimaginable power.

Sometimes children are provided with a pile of Cheerios or Froot Loops cereal and a string so they can make a Mother’s Day necklace for their mamas. Compare that to a string of priceless pearls and diamonds given by the world’s wealthiest man. I think the difference between our works and God’s grace is infinitely bigger than that.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

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“How Can You Say I Can’t Lose

My Salvation?”

I mess up all the time, and God is holy all the time. How can you say I can’t lose my salvation?

I’m so glad you asked!

First– and please hear me say this firmly but gently– it’s not your salvation to lose. It is a free gift from God. Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” You did nothing to earn God’s gift of salvation, and you can do nothing to “ungift” it. As some have said, salvation is 100% God and 0% human effort. All we do is receive it, by faith. And God even gives us the grace to receive it in the first place! As I said, it’s 100% God.

Let me suggest three points that support the position that you can’t lose God’s gift of salvation.

1. God makes some breathtaking, unconditional promises in the Bible that express His heart toward us.

I love most what Jesus said in John 10:27-30–

> “My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; ***no one will snatch them from My hand***. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and ***no one can snatch them from My Father’s hand***. The Father and I are one.”

We are doubly safe; we are held securely in the Father’s hand and the Son’s hand. No one, not even ourselves, can snatch us from that place of eternal security.

Then, in both the Old Testament (Joshua 1:5) and the New Testament (Hebrews 13:5), God promises, “I will never leave

you or forsake you."

In 2 Timothy 2:13, we read that "If we are unfaithful (or "unbelieving"), God is faithful."

We are safe in the Lord's love, protection, care . . . and salvation.

2. We have been promised *everlasting* (or eternal) life, not *temporary* life.

Jesus promised in John 5:24, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has *everlasting* life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

And in 1 John 5:13, Jesus' best friend writes, "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know** that you have *eternal* life."

It's not everlasting or eternal if you could stop it by doing something to lose your salvation!

3. You have been forgiven completely and totally.

When Jesus breathed His last on the cross with the statement, "It is finished/paid in full," that was about paying the penalty for your sins, my sins, all the sins of all the humans on the planet. And He paid for ALL of them 2000+ years ago—when all your sins were still future. Praise God, you are not powerful enough to undo what Jesus did for you on the cross.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit worked together to give you the magnificent gift of salvation. It's a forever gift and you can relax in the Lord's security.

I hope you find this helpful.

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

(I am indebted to the online discussion between Dr. Sean McDowell and Dr. Andrew Farley for perspective on this issue.)

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"Why Can't We Talk to Our Loved Ones Who Have Passed?"

Why can't we talk to our loved one who has passed? I am having a very hard time with death and the feeling that it is cruel that we can't know our loved one is ok. My years of church taught me to know of God's love for us which gives us eternal life, but the cruelty of not knowing how our loved one is or their terrible suffering seems so unlike the personality I have had of God.

Dear _____,

I am so sorry for your heartache at missing your loved one. I truly understand; it's only been a few months since we lost our son and we miss him very much.

I think God uses the heartache of losing communication with our loved ones to remind us that death and separation was not part of His original good creation, so we gain a fuller understanding of the impact of sin on our world—and why it required something as huge as the death of God's Son to rectify. I also believe God redeems the pain of grief so we can learn how to turn to Him as "the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). If we were able to communicate with our loved ones, it would be so easy to bypass God altogether and

just seek to connect with our friends and family—just as we so often do with those with us on earth.

We are so limited by our earthly existence, we can't begin to imagine the intense joy and glory of our believing loved ones' life in heaven. And if you could see your unbelieving loved one in the torment of hell, would that bring you any peace, or would it rip you apart inside? I think that "not knowing" is the grace of God for us still here on earth.

It's interesting and poignant that you used the world "cruelty." And it's easy to think that it's God who is being cruel. But the true source of cruelty in our enemy, Satan, whose agenda is to "steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10). It was his idea to inflict immeasurable pain on us as God's image-bearers by bringing sin into the Garden of Eden.

We do know in Deuteronomy 18 that God forbids us try to contact the dead. He even calls it an abomination. All of God's prohibitions are given to us for our protection and blessing, so like with so many other things, there must be something about God's "no" in this issue that is meant for our good.

The Got Questions website has a couple of articles you may find helpful as well:
If we talk to loved ones who have died, do they hear us?
Can I ask God to deliver a message to a loved one who has died?

_____, I send this with a prayer for the God of all comfort to give you His comfort as you trust Him in His goodness. And in Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 3:16, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way."

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

Posted Jan. 2025

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“When Did People Start Worshiping Yahweh?”

What is the history/origin of belief in Yahweh? I am being told that Yahweh was one of many gods initially believed in by the Canaanites, and eventually the followers were better at presenting Yahweh as the God of Israel?

First, let’s define worship. Worship is the act of expressing reverence, devotion and adoration towards God. Rituals, singing songs, prayers and ceremonies represent the act of worship.

Next, before answering your question, I’m convinced a critical explanation of scripture will suffice to help add credibility. The book of Nehemiah states that God made the heavens and the host of heavens (9:6). The heavens, in this passage, refers to the sky or the expanse that is above the surface of the earth. The term “heaven of heavens” refers to everything outside of the earth’s atmosphere. These are the planets, galaxies, etc. This passage also mentions the singular word host which means “the stars” or “celestial bodies.” Now, I do not want to confuse you, because the plural word “hosts” apply to God’s angel armies. With that, the passage of scripture concludes, “and the heavenly host bows down before You”{1}. Some translations state, “…the heavenly host worship You.” If we take this into account, we could say that according to Genesis 1:1, worship regarding nature started after Yahweh created it. According to Deuteronomy 33:27, the eternal attribution of the God of Israel indicates the worship of Him pre-exists the creation of the earth through the worship of the angels in

heaven (Isaiah 40:28, Romans 1:20, Revelation 4:8).

The name YHWH (*Yahweh*) first appears in Exodus 3:14 when God made Himself known to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM. . . . Say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you."{3} This links to "The Real Formal Full Personal Name of God"{3} in Exodus 6:2-3. The name reflects His redeeming acts regarding His chosen people. It parallels the need of the Hebrews during their captivity in Egypt thus largely translated as "I am/will be present."

Researchers have yet to conclude whether Canaanites worship paralleled the worship YHWH of the Israelites. The suggestions indicate the Canaanites may have used the name Yahweh in worship along with other deities, yet with no evidence of true relationship with the God of Moses—like using the word "god" today in a broad sense rather than using "The LORD God." We do know that the Yahweh of the Israelites responded to Moses and to the cry of the Israelites. We cannot say the same for the Canaanites. Because no evidence of Yahweh responding to Canaanite worship exists, this could indicate that Canaanite worship lacked value.

Notes

1. New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Nehemiah 9:6.
2. New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Exodus 3:14.
3. Martin A. Shields and Ralph K. Hawkins, "YHWH," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

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“What Does It Mean to Be Made in the Image of God?”

How would you explain what it means to be made in the image of God to a brand new Christian or someone who hasn’t made that decision?

Great question! I think the bottom line is that God made us like Himself so that other parts of creation can see what He is like by looking at us and how we act. Since God is not physical, it’s not a resemblance in our bodies, but is the immaterial, inside parts of us. Kind of like how family values and habits can be seen among family members. We are all made in the image of God, but sometimes people lie about what God is like when they act in ways that are NOT the image of God, such as cruelty or not being kind and loving.

Let me give you three different aspects of what I found.

Got Questions has a couple of good answers:

What does it mean that humanity is made in the image of God?
www.gotquestions.org/image-of-God.html

What does it mean when God said, “Let Us make man in Our image” (Genesis 1:26)?
www.gotquestions.org/let-Us-make-man-in-Our-image.html

And to my surprise, I really liked the answer I got from Meta AI with the prompt, *“Explain to a child what it means to be made in the image of God”:*

> What a wonderful topic!
>
> So, you know how sometimes you might draw a picture of your

family or friends? You try to make the drawing look like them, with their same smile, eyes, and hair. It's like a special copy of them.

Well, when the Bible says we're made in the image of God, it means that God created us to be like Him. Not exactly like Him, because He's God and we're humans, but we have some special qualities that are similar to His.

Here are a few things that make us like God:

We can love: Just like God loves us, we can love our family, friends, and even people we don't know. We can show kindness, care, and compassion to others.

We can think and create: God is super creative and wise. He made the whole universe! We can also think, imagine, and create things like art, music, and stories.

We have a conscience: God knows right from wrong, and He wants us to know the difference too. We have a special voice inside that helps us choose good over bad.

We can talk and communicate: God speaks to us through the Bible and in our hearts. We can talk to Him through prayer, and we can communicate with each other using words.

We are special and valuable: God thinks we're so valuable that He sent His own Son, Jesus, to save us. We're like precious jewels to Him!

Being made in God's image doesn't mean we're perfect, though. We still make mistakes and do things we shouldn't. But it means we have the potential to be like God in many amazing ways.

So, remember: you're a special creation, made to love, think, create, and shine like God!

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue

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“Do Babies Go to Heaven?”

Do babies and small children go to heaven?

We have lengthy answers to this question here and here, but Shane Pruitt provided an especially insightful, excellent answer to this question on X (Twitter):

At 12:50 AM on a Tuesday morning, our ten-year-old son with unique needs went to be Jesus.

So, a statement like this begs the question, “Am I just wishing this to be true, or do I Biblically know this to be true?”

Meaning, is there support in Scripture that God welcomes babies (born and unborn), young children, and those with unique mental needs (meaning they may be older, but have the mind of a child) immediately into Heaven?

I absolutely believe the Bible answers this. Here are Biblical reasons why I know this to be true:

God’s Knowledge: The Lord knows every child at conception and values them. They are considered a person, known and loved by God, from the very beginning. (Psalm 139:13 – 16).

God’s Declaration: God refers to young children as “innocents”. Not that they were perfect or without a sin nature, but they were innocent of the ability to understand the need of repentance and forgiveness. (Jeremiah 19:4).

God's Promise: In Deuteronomy, we find an unbelieving generation of Israelites being prevented from entering the Promised Land, but their children were exempt from that penalty and were able to enter (Deuteronomy 1:39).

God's Possession: He considers all babies to be His. God condemns Israel in Ezekiel 16:21, of the wretched act of child sacrifice. "You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire."

God's Compassion: He has compassion on all little ones and infants, and is not willing that even one of them should perish (Matthew 18:14). His grace covers them, until they realize their need of a Savior.

God's Illustration: He used a child to illustrate what one must become like to enter His Kingdom (Matthew 18:1 -5). If infants and children would end up in Hell if they died young, He most likely wouldn't use them as an illustration of how to enter the Kingdom.

God's Compliment: He said children were the greatest in His Kingdom (Matthew 18:4).

God's Blessing: Jesus blessed the little children and said the Kingdom of God belongs to them (Mark 9:13 – 16). Jesus typically didn't bless those destined to Hell or promise them the Kingdom, unless He meant it.

David's Assurance: David knew that he would be in heaven forever after death (Ps 23:6). He also had the assurance that his baby (that had died) would be there as well, where they would be reunited. "… I will go to him, but he will not return to me (2 Samuel 12:22 – 23)."

God's Presence: I do not believe in a "soul sleep". When babies, young children, and those with unique needs die; they are with the Lord immediately (2 Corinthians 5:8, Luke 23:43).

God is not silent on this topic. Scripture speaks.

Therefore, you can know with absolute confidence that you did not “lose” your baby, child, or loved one with unique needs. You didn’t lose them, because you know exactly where they are. They are perfectly and fully alive with Jesus.

Posted 8/3/2023

“How Is It Moral To Own People as Property?”

How is it moral to own people as property and pass them along to your heirs, Leviticus 25:44-46?

We wouldn’t say it’s moral, but it IS part of life in a fallen world deeply impacted by sin.

The Bible never condones slavery, but God does regulate it to protect people where slavery was part of an economic system.

Much of slavery in the ancient world was different from the heinous, inhuman, and degrading slavery of the past several hundred years (and unfortunately, continuing into today). People would choose to sell themselves into slavery as a way of managing debt and insufficient income to provide for themselves and their families.

Slavery has been and is part of a fallen world, but ultimately, when Jesus Christ sets everything right in the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no slavery. God does have a plan and a timeline for abolishing slavery altogether and forever.

Here's some helpful insight on the subject: www.gotquestions.org/Bible-slavery.html

Blessing you,

Sue Bohlin

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"How Could Jesus Take Our Sins on Himself If God Cannot Tolerate Sin?"

How was it that Jesus, considering He is fully God, and God is not able to have sin anywhere near Him, can take all of our sins on Himself? Having trouble wrapping my mind around this. I fully believe what Jesus did, however, this is a bit confusing for me.

Great question.

You are operating with a misunderstanding common to a LOT of people, that "God is not able to have sin anywhere near Him." That's not true. First, consider Job 1, where the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain on heaven and we see Satan striding confidently into heaven's throne room. God allowed the most evil of creatures access to Himself. Second, consider the incarnation, where the Son wrapped Himself in human flesh and entered the sin-filled world where he was literally surrounded by nothing but sinful people His entire earthly existence.

I think it's helpful to look at Habakkuk 1:13, where the

prophet writes, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.” This is Habakkuk’s perspective on God, but it is not teaching doctrine. We know from Job 1 that while He is pure, it does not prevent Him from looking on evil. We also know that God is so longsuffering, He does tolerate wrongdoing. He just won’t tolerate it forever.

Does this help remove the obstacle to acknowledging that the Holy One can take all our sin into and onto Himself while on the cross? Even without fully understanding what a deep mystery it is?

Blessing you,
Sue Bohlin

Thanks so much for getting back to me and yes that helped and yes it is very deep and mind boggling. And what is it that they say? To completely understand something like that we would then have the mind of God, right?

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“Why Was Jesus Crucified Outside Jerusalem?”

What is the meaning behind Jesus being crucified outside Jerusalem?

There is an interesting passage in Hebrews 13:10-14 which speaks of Jesus suffering “outside the gate” of Jerusalem. Since this letter was originally written to Jewish believers who were tempted to abandon their Christian faith and return to Judaism and the Temple, the author seems to be encouraging

his readers to share Christ's humiliation and rejection by the Jewish community. This is symbolized by their going "outside" the Jewish community and sharing in Christ's sufferings. As one commentator puts it, "In essence, the author's command to 'go forth to' Christ was a command to abandon Judaism. Anyone found with Christ—outside of the city gate—would be considered outside the Jewish community."

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"Is Soul Sleep Biblical?"

I am writing to seek clarification on the rather thorny issue of life after death. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 Paul outlines how the process of judgment will take place. He says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a loud cry of summons, with the shout of an archangel, and with the blast of the trumpet of God. And those who have departed this life in Christ will rise first." Isn't this a substantive indication of "soul sleep"? If what Paul asserts is anything to go by it means that after death the soul remains in somewhat a "holding cell" until the day of judgment regardless of the person's beliefs and tenets prior to death. An appendage would be 1 Samuel 28:1-14; I believe this passage also corroborates the "holding cell" school of thought.

Thanks for your letter. This is a very important issue. I am personally persuaded that the doctrine of "soul sleep" is incorrect. When the Bible speaks of death in terms of "sleep," it is speaking this way because the person's body looks as if it were asleep. In other words, this way of speaking has to do

with the body, and not the soul.

This is evident, I think, when one considers a passage like Luke 16:19-31. Both the rich man and Lazarus die, but their souls are very far from being “asleep” (in the sense of unconscious). The men in this story, although physically dead, are pictured as consciously awake and aware of their surroundings. Their bodies have died, but their souls are very much conscious in the afterlife.

This is also evident in Revelation 6:9-11. And it is further supported by the teaching (concerning believers) that when we die, we go immediately to be with the Lord. Here, remember what Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “Today, you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Or consider Paul’s statements in passages like 2 Cor. 5:1-10 or Philippians 1:23. All of these passages indicate, I think, that believers are conscious and with the Lord in paradise between death and resurrection. Unbelievers, likewise, are also conscious (though they are in torment and separated from the Lord).

Hence, the Bible seems to teach that we continue to experience some form of personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection.

I hope that these passages from Scripture will help to clear up this issue for you.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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