

Faith Does Not Merit Salvation And Eternal Life

Contrary to what I have said in the section “The whole salvation package is a free gift, not a merited reward” in Chapter “Salvation”, someone may argue, “In John 6:29, Jesus taught that believing in Him is a grace-empowered good work. So faith in Him is the God-inspired means by which we merit salvation and eternal life.” Let us examine John 6:27-29 to see the errors involved in the above arguments. John 6:27-29 says: “***Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.’ Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’***”

Note the following key points:

- The “***work(s) of God***” are not the same as “***works of Law***” or the “***works***” mentioned in Romans 4:4, 11:6, Ephesians 2:9 and 2 Timothy 1:9. In some contexts, “***works of God***” are those actions He does. In other contexts, “***works of God***” are those human actions that He inspires or motivates but which do not merit these human vessels anything.¹ “Works of Law” means trying to earn or merit being saved and being given other God-given blessings by obeying the Law of Moses by mere human power and without trusting faith in God. Works of law can also refer to trying to merit blessings from God through acts of obedience done by mere human power to the broader Law of God expressed, for example, in the two great love commands Jesus gave. The “***works***” mentioned in Romans 4:4, 11:6, Ephesians 2:9 and 2 Timothy 1:9 are any type of human action by which we try to merit salvation and eternal life.
- In John 6:29, Christ calls faith in Him a “***work of God***”. He does this because saving faith is something which God the Father and God the Son inspire in His people by the Holy Spirit (see Romans 12:3, 1 Timothy 1:14 and Hebrews 12:2). In Acts 18:27, Luke records it is because of *God’s unmerited grace* that we can have faith in Him: “***...those who had believed through grace.***” God the Father *does not force* people to believe in Him or in Jesus Christ. But without Him empowering us by His Spirit to believe in Him, we could not do it rightly.
- Because our faith in the Father and in Christ is a *gift of unmerited grace*, we cannot merit salvation or eternal life by our faith. Faith in God and Christ is the God-appointed means by which we *receive* His unearned grace of salvation and eternal life. Faith is not a legalistic action by which we can merit salvation and eternal life.
- The phrase “***you believe***” in John 6:29 is in the present tense in Greek. Usually in Greek, the present tense refers to continuous or repeated action. So I believe Christ was saying in

¹ God’s works or actions are recorded in John 9:3, 10:37, Acts 2:11, 13:41, Romans 14:20, Hebrews 1:10, 2:7, 3:9, 4:4, 4:10 and Revelation 15:3.

this verse that we initially receive and continue to have eternal life by continuously believing in Christ.

- In John 6:27, Christ promised eternal life as a free gift. He referred to **“everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you...”** In Greek, the phrase **“will give”** here is a form of the word “didomi”. The word “didomi” in itself has no overtones of merit or earning in it unless it is used in a context related to giving merited rewards or earned wages. In Luke 11:13 and John 14:16, Christ used the same form of the word “didomi” as He used in John 6:27. In Luke 11:13 and John 14:16, He revealed the Father would give the Holy Spirit as a *free gift*. We do not receive the Holy Spirit as a merited reward. In Acts 14:3, Luke used a form of “didomi” to refer to God granting miracles as unmerited gifts of His grace: **“Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”**
- After Christ promised eternal life as a free unmerited gift in John 6:27, the Jews asked the legalistic question: **“What shall we do that we may work the works of God?”** Note these Jews thought they had to do *many works* in order to receive eternal life. In Greek, the word **“works”** in John 6:27 is the *plural* word “erga”. But Christ responded that they only had to do *one* work of God. This work of God is having faith in Jesus Christ. In Greek in John 6:28, the word **“work”** is “ergon” which is the *singular* form.

Like many legalists throughout the history of the church, these Jews imagined God required them to do many different types of God-empowered good works or actions in order to merit eternal life. The Jews mentioned in John 6:28 did not refer to doing their own human good works done by their own power alone. Instead they asked Christ about what God-empowered, grace-inspired good works or **“works of God”** they had to do to merit eternal life.

These legalistic Jews of John 6:28 were confused by the fact that Christ had, as recorded in verse 27, linked laboring or working with receiving eternal life. In Greek, the word **“labor”** in verse 27 is the present tense form of the word “ergazomai”. As stated earlier, the present tense in Greek usually refers to continuous or repeated action. So they assumed Christ was referring to doing many different types of grace-empowered good works repeatedly.

- The New Testament does not teach that other types of God-empowered, grace-inspired good works are wrong (see John 3:21, 10:32, Acts 9:36, 26:20, 1 Timothy 2:10, 5:10, 6:18, Titus 2:7, 3:8, 3:14, James 2:14-26 and 1 Peter 2:12). Those with saving faith will manifest such good works as fruit or results of their faith. But we receive salvation and eternal life by the **“work of God”** which is faith in Jesus Christ and not as a result of these other works or actions.