

## James: What About *Salvation by Works* Elsewhere in Scripture? Part 3

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### I. Introduction

James may be talking about saving your life from death and not your soul from hell, but what about passages in the Bible which seem to say that if you live a sinful life, you'll end up in hell? Does sin and lack of good works prove that you were never really saved and on your way to hell?

### II. James: What About Other Passages that Connect Good Works to Eternal Salvation?

It's clear that James is saying that if we fail to practice (works) what we believe (faith), our faith will not save us from God's discipline for sin which may include death (1:15, 21; 5:19-20). But what about other passages which seem to connect good works with eternal salvation?

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, FIRST, who is the audience? They are saints who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus and God is their Father, 1:2-3. This is not a potential reality, i.e., this has already happened: they *have been* sanctified in Christ and adopted into God's family (James 1:18). Human birth cannot be undone, much less so the new birth (John 10:28-29). SECOND, 1 Corinthians itself says that you cannot lose your salvation even if you failed to produce good works, 3:10-15. This passage is about receiving rewards (inheritance, 3:14), not about entrance into the Kingdom, thus, Jesus will evaluate everyone's works to see which merit reward and which go up in flames. But even if all your works go up in flames, you yourself "will be saved, yet so as through fire." Fire is not a reference to the Lake of Fire but Jesus' standard which will determine which works are rewarded and which are burned. THIRD, what's the context? Prior to 6:9-11, Paul chastises the Corinthians for sinning against each other in legal matters (instead of settling their legal disputes in the church or taking a financial loss, they're suing each other in non-Christian courts before non-Christian judges). Then Paul warns them that "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God," not fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, nor extortioners. BUT then Paul says something crucial to understanding this passage: "such **were** some of you. But you **were washed**, but you **were sanctified**, but you **were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." It's crucial to understand that they **have been** washed, sanctified, and justified, otherwise the warning is meaningless. That is, if Christians never live in sin or automatically produce good works, then Paul's warning makes no sense. But if Christians can be unrighteous and live in sin (as the Corinthians are, 3:1-3) or fail to produce good works, then Paul's warning makes sense. FINALLY, this passage is about inheritance not entrance into the Kingdom ("inherit" in 3:9), which does have to do with your righteous behavior, i.e., good works, as Paul already pointed out, 3:10-15.

**1 John 3:4-15**, FIRST, who is the audience? They are God's children, Jesus is their Advocate, Jesus paid for all their sins, their sins have been forgiven, they've known Jesus, they've overcome Satan, they've known God the Father, the Word of God abides in them, God has given them eternal life, and they believe in Jesus' name, 2:1-2, 12-14; 3:1-2; 5:11, 13—notice that in the very passage in question they are called God's children. SECOND, the key to understanding phrases like "whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him," or "he

who sins is of the devil," is what John says at the beginning of this discussion. He tells his audience that they are God's children who will one day be pure as Jesus is pure, therefore, they should purify themselves now, 3:1-3 (cf. 2:28). It is in this context that John starts talking about sin, Satan, and the difference between God's children and Satan's. THIRD, John is not saying that if they sin, they're Satan's child or have never known God. It's clear that they do know God; John made this clear several times, 2:12-14. What then does John mean by these comments; in what way do they not know God when they sin? The question Jesus is asking us in 1 John is, "Where will you live (abide in) your life, with Me or Satan?" The word "abide" shows up over and over, 1:7; 2:6, 10, 14, 17, 24, 27, 28; 3:6, 9, 14-15, 17, 24; 4:12, 13, 15, 16. When we sin, we abide with Satan and therefore look like one of his children, 3:10. But Jesus came to take away our sin and destroy the works of the Devil, 3:5, 8. But when we fail to abide in Him (where there is no sin, 3:5), then it can be said of us that we don't see or know Him and are instead of the Devil, 3:6, 8. And this is God's point: we are God's children who will one day be as pure as His son, therefore, we should purify ourselves now by abiding in His Son and staying away from sin. If we don't, we abide with Satan in death, 3:14. FOURTH, some appeal to the Greek present tense to say that John is talking about *ongoing* sin, not occasional sin (which is how some translations attempt to render 3:8). Thus, John is saying that if you *continue to* sin, then you're of the Devil. However, this appeal to the Greek present tense is selective. And if we applied that same principle to the other present tense verbs, it would make nonsense, e.g., it would make 3:4 and 6 say that if you only sin occasionally then you're not committing lawlessness and you have seen and known God.

**2 Timothy 2:11-13**, FIRST, who's the audience? Timothy, who is Paul's spiritual son, God is his Father, Jesus Christ is his Lord, has genuine faith, his mother and grandmother brought him to faith in Christ, has a gift of God in him, and God's given him a spirit of power, love and sound mind, 1:2, 5, 6, 7. SECOND, what's the context? Paul is urging Timothy to endure as he has in order to be rewarded by the Lord, 2:1-10. Thus, the salvation he mentions in 2:10 is not eternal salvation but salvation from being disqualified from the reward of reigning with Christ, 2:11-13. Paul wants Timothy and the elect to obtain the salvation he's attained, which is in Christ Jesus and has eternal rewards, 2:10. THIRD, the passage itself clearly states that God cannot deny you eternal salvation even if you are faithless to Him, 2:13. This passage is about eternal rewards/inheritance/reigning with Christ not eternal salvation. If we endure the hardships that come with serving Christ, then Christ will reward us with reigning with Him. But if we deny Him our endurance, then He will deny us reigning with Him. AND if we completely turn our back on Jesus, He will remain faithful because He cannot deny us who are permanently part of Him (Ephesians 2:5-6); to do this would be to deny Himself.

**Revelation 20:11-15**, FIRST, who's the audience? The audience is the seven churches made up of Christians who have been loved by Jesus, washed from their sins by Jesus' blood, and are God's kings and priests, 1:4, 5-6. SECOND, what's the context? After the 1,000 year reign of Christ, Satan is released into the world. He deceives and gathers the armies of the world against the Lord's saints. But then God reigns fire down on all of them consuming them. Then Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire where the beast and the false prophet are tormented day and night forever, 20:7-10. In 20:11-15 John shows us who else ends up in the Lake of Fire. THIRD, this judgment is for the dead, 20:12-13. Why's this important? Because those who have life don't show up at this judgment (John 5:24). FOURTH, why did the dead end up in the Lake of Fire? Not because a lack of good works, because they lacked eternal life, 20:15.

### III. Conclusion

*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*