

# Doxological Versus Mithological Amoralism

*Revised 1/1/2010*

## Calvinistic Work

Calvinists claim that saving faith is literally a *work of God* in the sense of produced by God in Jn 6:29. But advocates of this rationale do not necessarily stop with this assertion. They also appeal to the popular interpretation that sees *work* in this passage as a *work of man* in another sense of the word *work*.

But adopting this popular opinion puts one in the unnatural position of having to argue that saving faith is a work. But if saving faith is a work, then certainly everything else is a work as well. Calvinists taking this approach are forced pragmatically to prove that everything we do is a work in at least some sense of the word.<sup>1</sup> Calvinists must prove at least two basic presuppositions:

### Calvinistic Presuppositions

1. Saving faith is a work in some normal, literal sense of the word *work*.
2. Saving faith is a work in the Calvinistic sense meaning produced by God.<sup>2</sup>

However, for those Calvinists who simultaneously appeal to the popular opinion that faith is a work of man in this passage, their dualistic work-of-God-and-man approach realistically leads to two necessary corollaries which must also be proven in order to maintain these two premises:

### Calvinistic Corollaries

1. Every good thing you do is a good work.
2. Every good work is not a meritorious good work.

## 1Cor 10:31

The second corollary is a must; otherwise, saving faith ends up being a meritorious work, in clear conflict with Pauline soteriology. But what about the first corollary? Some of those taking a dualistic Calvinistic approach employ 1Cor 10:31 in defense of the first corollary. Their overall argument is that everything we do is a work in some sense of the word, so faith is a work in some sense of the word in Jn 6:29. Their more specialized argument to prove this premise from 1Cor 10:31 runs something along these lines:

### Doxological-Mithological Syllogism

1. Whatever you do should be done to the glory of God.
2. Whatever is done to the glory of God is a good work.
3. Therefore, whatever you do is a good work.

Indeed, those taking this approach have appealed to a FG article by [Art Farstad](#), who has defined good work in this manner: "Anything that the believer does to the glory of God is a good work." But this unguarded definition, when enjoined with his affirmation that God will reward our good works, leads unwittingly to the conclusion that the gift of eternal life is a reward rather than a gift. This in turn conflicts with the fact that Paul does not regard saving faith as a work. This observation destroys the above *Doxological-Mithological Syllogism* taken by dualistic Calvinists to argue that everything we do is a good work. But it is one thing to show weakness in an interpretation, it is quite another to provide a superior one. Our solution will thus need to provide a harmonization between Paul's exhortation to do everything to the glory of God and the conclusion that not everything we do is a good work.

To begin with, note that when we believe in Christ for eternal life, we do so to the glory of God's grace. Does this mean that this faith is a work? No. According to Paul, saving faith is not a work since it results in a gift. God is glorified by our coming to faith, but soteriological faith is not a work. Paul contrasts it with works. So everything we do to the glory of God is not a work. Greater precision and clarification is needed in considering just what Paul means to convey by his exhortation in 1Cor 10:31.

Paul uses a similar appeal in Col 3:23 when he encourages us to glorify God in *whatever we do*. In that verse, he is talking about work: "*Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men;*

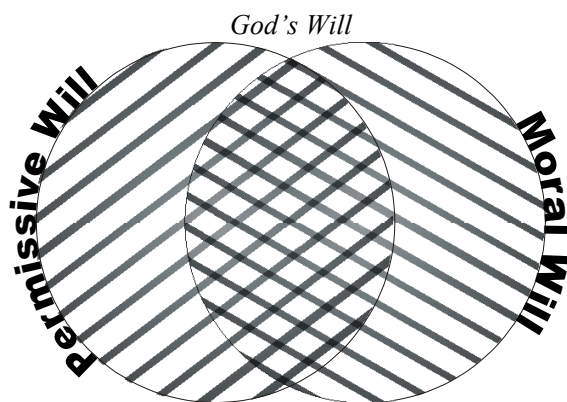
knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance” (Col 3:23-24). Does this mean that *whatever you do* is a *work*? No. According to the context, whatever work we do in service to someone else may be considered a good work rewarded by the Lord. That context is not saying, however, that if you order mustard on your burger you will be rewarded by God. Ordering mustard is not done in service to someone else. Contextually, *whatever you do* that may be regarded as *work* may be expected to result *in the reward of the inheritance* if it is done *as for the Lord*.

### Misthological Amorality

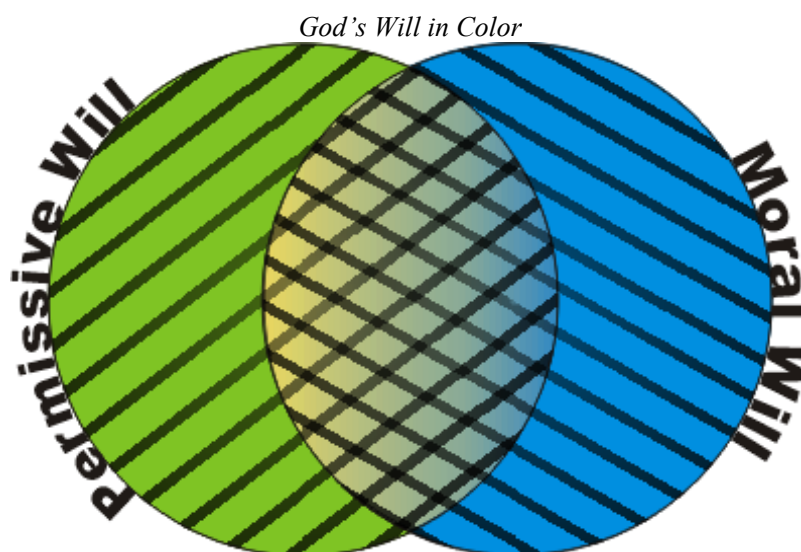
But when the phrase *whatever you do* occurs in 1Cor 10:31, it is used much more comprehensively in that context than it is in Col 3:23, where it was limited to work and covers eating as well as drinking. It may be that Col 3:17 is intended to be taken more comprehensively as well. In any event, work is not the only thing we were created to do. We were also created to enjoy food, drink, and rest. We not only glorify God by working but also by enjoying the things He has created us to enjoy. Paul focuses on this more comprehensive manner in which we may glorify God when he says, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1Cor 10:31). We glorify God by doing the things He has created us to do within the moral boundaries of His will. These things are good, but they do not necessarily merit a reward. For example, in this context, rather than promising a reward for *whatever you do* (as he did in Col 3:23 when he is talking about *work*), Paul says here in Corinthians, “All things are permissible, but **not** all things are **profitable**” (1Cor 10:23; TM). *Whatever you do* is *not* necessarily *profitable* in this passage. Not everything you do in this passage is profitable/rewardable for the simple reason that this passage is not limiting itself to whatever is considered work.

When we do our work for the Lord, we are following His explicit command in Col 3:23, and we are promised a positive reward. If, on the other hand, we were lazy workers who pilfer from our employers, we would be disobeying God (Tit 2:10) and would thus be subject to a negative reward. Thus, in Col 3:23 Paul is talking about *whatever you do* that would be considered *work* by God and thus necessarily rewardable or punishable (in view of Tit 2:10) by God. By application, we can refer to such works as those things which are commanded by your employer. However, in 1Cor 10:31 Paul is talking much more comprehensively and not limiting himself to work. Ordering mustard is not something your employer is likely to command you to do. There are many good things that are not works which may be enjoyed as morally permissible even though they are not misthologically profitable. They are not explicitly commanded by God. There is no commandment in the Bible which says, “Thou shall order mustard.” These amoral activities, however, are done to the glory of God even though they are not rewarded by God. As pictured in the diagram, we glorify God when we enjoy His creation within the parameters of His moral will.

Since *whatever you do* **should** be done to the glory of God, anything not done to the glory of God is a sin (i.e., a bad work). Consequently, anything we do must either be a good or a bad in the moral sense. If it is done to the glory of God, it is within the His moral will. If it is not done to the glory of God, it falls outside of His moral will and is thus immoral. God may permit an immoral action, but He does not desire it. Typically, this is assumed to mean that man’s immoral actions are relegated to God’s permissive will while his moral actions are relegated to God’s perfect will.



To Friesen's credit, he recognizes that there is an area of freedom (which we term as permissive will) within God's moral will. Unfortunately, due to Friesen's Calvinistic moorings, he believes that God causes people to sin (although perhaps he would not acknowledge it so bluntly). Their sin is Calvinistically diagramed by Friesen as an expression of God's sovereign will.<sup>3</sup> Our simple correction of his diagram is seen above. But if we put it in color in order to combine misthology with morality within the context of doxology, we derive the diagram below.

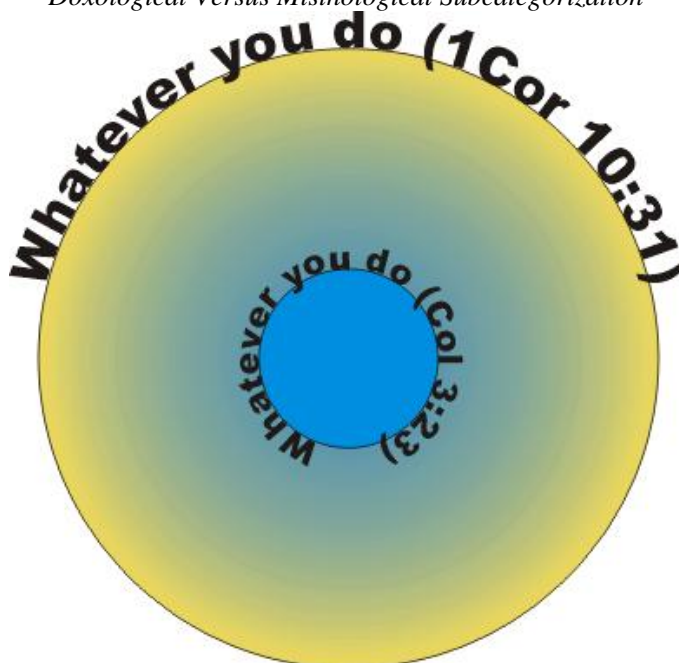


*Immoral* practices are within God's permissive will but fall outside of the boundaries of His moral will. God allows immoral actions, but He does not condone them; rather, He will punish them. Negative works will result in negative rewards. These immoral actions resulting in negative rewards are denoted by green in the diagram. God has to give the green light to permit such actions, but He will judge such actions to be immoral. On the other hand, faith in God cannot be considered immoral. God does not give us eternal life for doing something bad. Believing in Him is not a bad thing to do. Saving faith certainly does not fall within the green spectrum. Nor can it be misthologically colored blue. It would have to be misthological neutral, like mustard.

For that matter, there are many things that fall within the scope of God's permissive will that are not wrong and that would be morally neutral. They are well within the boundaries of His moral will but do not merit reward. Unrewarded actions, which are good in the broad sense of the word *good*, may be called *amoral*. Yellow in the diagram denotes those actions that fall within the moral parameters of God's permissive will that are *permissible* but not *profitable* (1Cor 10:23). They are good in the sense that they can be done to the *glory* (*doxa*) of God (1Cor 10:31). They are thus doxologically moral. But they are neutral in the sense that they are not misthologically profitable. Activities falling within this sphere are good actions that are not regarded as good works.<sup>4</sup> God permits you to order yellow mustard on your burger, but He is not going to reward you for choosing mustard rather than ketchup. Although saving faith is commanded, it nevertheless falls within the yellow spectrum because what is given in response to it is a gift rather than a reward.

There are also actions that are rewardable which fall within the positive scope of His permissive will. God may have gifted you as a teacher, but He may leave it up to you as to whether or not you will exercise that gift in the pulpit or the classroom, or in writing rather than preaching. You have a choice. As long as you exercise that choice within the parameters of His moral will, you may very well find yourself equally rewarded regardless of which choice you make. Those moral actions which result in reward are colored in blue. Many are explicitly commanded in the Bible such as, "Do not lie." But to make *do not taste* mustard such a command would be ridiculous (Col 2:21). Tasting mustard is misthologically amoral. Therefore, the positive scope of God's permissive will encompasses both misthologically amoral and moral actions. Misthologically amoral actions (i.e., actions which are neutral misthologically) fall within the permissive realm of God's moral parameters. We can enjoy tasting mustard to the glory of God, just don't expect to be rewarded for it.

*Doxological Versus Misthological Subcategorization*

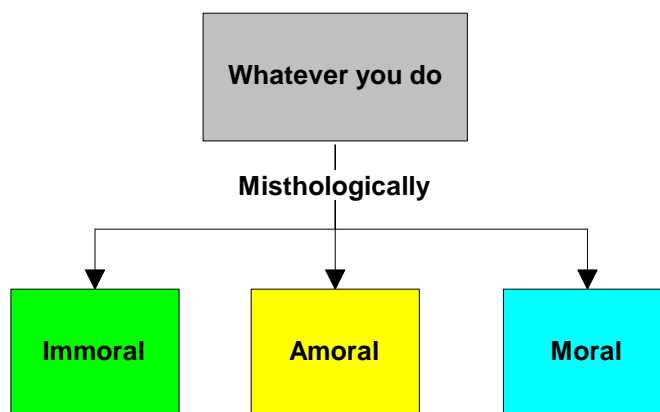


To illustrate this truth yet another way, picture yellow (depicting misthologically neutral mustard) as one of the things you are permitted to enjoy tasting to the glory of God. But there are no rewards for something that is misthologically neutral. The blue subset represents the smaller sphere of things explicitly commanded by God. If we do them, we will be rewarded by God. The blue that bleeds over into the yellow sphere illustrates the fact that some things we are not explicitly commanded to do by God are nevertheless rewardable by God.

The existence of the bleed-over in color does not mean that there are no moral absolutes. Something that is immoral is not moral and vice versa. On the other hand, not everything is an absolute. Eating meat is not absolutely the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do regardless of other considerations. [David Malick](#) correctly points out: “While eating meat is an amoral issue, some do not know this and defile their conscience when they eat [1Cor 8:7-8].” Constable notes many other amoral examples in 1Corinthians (e.g., 7:38,40; 10:23,33).<sup>5</sup> Things which are amoral do not necessarily result in reward, but they are still to be done to the glory of God. We glorify God by enjoying doing the things that we were created to do, and that includes eating and drinking.

It is a strange assertion indeed that claims that the only way we can glorify God is by working for God. Creation is the work of God’s hands. When He finished it, He said that it was “very good” (Gen 1:31). God was pleased with His workmanship and with how His workmanship performed: the stars, the sun, the moon, the plants, the animals, and the people. According to the Bible, even the stars and planets declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1). These amoral objects glorify God by their actions even though they are not moral creatures. God is glorified by the amoral actions of His creation. He is also glorified by the amoral actions of His creatures. Is God not glorified by the warm welcome your puppy gives you and by the beauty of a butterfly in flight? Certainly. These good gifts are from God, and we glorify God by embracing them. But we should not necessarily think that God will reward us for receiving a gift. He does not reward us for receiving the gift of eternal life. Receiving this gift is not a work, so what is given in response to receiving this gift is not a reward.

*Three Categories of Morality*



For those who would prefer a distinct categorization apart from graduation, a flow chart may be easier to follow than circles in which one color may sometimes gradually merge into another one. According to the Bible, we must run according to the rules (if we hope to be rewarded for what we do) in such a way that would categorically qualify us for rulership. To summarize four of these rules, in order for our actions to be misthologically moral, they must be done (1) voluntarily, (2) for God’s glory, (3) through the power of the Spirit, and (4) out of love for others. In other words, our actions must be done voluntarily, doxologically, nikologically, and lovingly to be rewarded positively. But does this mean that if one of these elements is missing that we are necessarily rewarded negatively? No. What if we perform an action out of compulsion rather than voluntarily? We will have no reward (1Cor 9:17). We will not necessarily be punished, but we will not profit either. Such an involuntary action may be treated amorally. But what if we only do it for the glory of God without love for others, or if we perform it in the strength of the flesh? Does such an action automatically qualify as a rewardable work? No. Anything not done out of love or by not abiding in Christ categorically amounts to nothing (Jn 15:5; 1Cor 13:2). Such actions will have no misthological value (1Cor 13:3). Paul says that such actions profit us nothing; they are unprofitable actions. According to the Bible, many actions may be amoral in God’s eyes and not be rewarded by Him (Mt 5:46; 6:1ff; Lk 6:32-35). It is not wrong, for example, to love those who love you or to greet your friends. But it would be wrong to conclude that doing these things will necessarily be treated as a work—either good or bad. Many times such responses may be merely misthologically neutral reactions not worthy of reward. Quite simply, not everything we do is considered a work.

If you come home from work and sit down to watch a ballgame on TV while your wife comes home from work and begins cooking dinner, will she consider your watching the ballgame work? Not hardly! There is no reason to think that God will necessarily consider it work either. Idly watching TV may be permissible, but it is not necessarily rewardable. Nor is there any reason to think that a Greek speaker in the NT would view the matter any differently. In Mt 20:3,6 some workers are asked why they are standing there not working. Their standing there *idle* (*argos*) was not considered work by Jesus or His audience. *Argos* is formed by adding the alpha privative to *ergon* and hence means without work. LN (42.46) defines it as *not working*. They were doing something—standing there—but it was not considered work. Nor would we today consider standing in an unemployment line to be work. Not everything we do is considered work, not by the lexicons or by common sense.

When Paul says, “If anyone will not work, neither let him eat,” he is not referring to work as anything we do. Breathing is not considered a work. Idleness can be a sin. Indeed, idle (i.e., worthless) words would be such an example (Mt 12:36). Alternately, the Bible indicates that amoral speech is also possible in which one speaks neither good nor bad (Gen 24:50; 31:24,29). Likewise, idleness can be morally neutral in some contexts, such as this one in Mt 20:3,6. They were just standing there. They were not sinning in doing so. Idleness can simply be equated with the absence of work, having no misthological value.

James says practically the same thing of faith without works (Jam 2:20). But in this context, there is reason to suspect that faith without works on such an occasion as that described in the context might actually be considered a work from a *bema* perspective. You may not necessarily be punished for having a non-working



faith. But do not expect to be rewarded for simply having it either. And do not expect that a dead faith, which might be regarded as mythologically neutral, will save you from a *bema* judgment that is expecting a mythologically productive faith. You can indeed be punished for not having works. In Mt 25:18 we find a do-nothing Christian. He is punished for what he did (burying His master's money) and for what he did not do (work). He did not work. Sometimes not working in one sense may be considered a work in another sense. Sins of omission are mythological works. We are negatively rewarded for not working when we should have.

This is not to say that we are never permitted to rest. It is permissible to rest on occasion (Mk 6:31). But rest would not normally be considered work. Rest need not necessarily mean doing nothing but would normally mean to do nothing that is regarded as work. We should not necessarily expect a reward for resting. For that matter, not even enduring affliction always results in a reward. Peter asks, "For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?" The implied answer to this rhetorical question is *none*. Such endurance is mythologically amoral. Patiently enduring justly deserved affliction has no mythological value. Such perseverance is mythologically amoral. But then Peter continues by stating: "But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God" (1Pet 2:20).

On the other hand, patiently enduring unjust affliction results in a reward. Paul says that God will "reward rest to you who are afflicted" (2Thess 1:7; CSB). Rest is a reward for enduring affliction in this passage. A deserved rest may thus be considered a reward for work. The Bible says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow with them'" (Rev 14:13). Rest is your reward for work. Work is rewarded with rest, not work with work or rest with rest. Now to be sure, this mythological rest will comprise much activity, such as ruling, but you are no longer working for the reward of rulership. Rulership is the reward. Rulership is not the work done to earn the reward.

The writer of Hebrews likewise urges us to work to enter this rest and describes it as being rest from one's work (Heb 4:10-11). It is a *Sabbath rest* (Heb 4:9). A *Sabbath rest* means to *not do any work* (Ex 20:10; Lev 16:29; Dt 5:14). It is a *complete rest* in which you are to *not do any work* (Lev 23:3). As [Lang](#) correctly surmises, it is an eschatological and mythological rest (Hebrews, 11-17). Dillow concurs (*Reign*, 94-102). Of course, we must perform this required work today rather than wait for the eschatological tomorrow. Future rewards are based on our present work. What rewards we are going to earn must be earned today. Therefore, from the perspective of scripture, rest is something we do, but rest is not a work. Rest is to *cease from work* (LN 23.81) The claim that everything we do is work does an injustice to the very concept of rest and to the other scriptural contrasts concerning work. We rest from our work. Rest is not a work. Granted, it will be responded by naysayers that rest is a work since rest denotes ruling.

#### ***Restful Work***

1. Rest = rulership.
2. Rulership = work.
3. Therefore, rest = work.

Rather than quibble over the fact that rulership is not called a work in the scripture, we will allow this popular association of rulership with the word *work* at the popular level. Accordingly, the activity involved in this rest may be called work in some popular sense of the word. But obviously, rest is not work in the sense intended by the biblical writers above. Those ruling are no longer working to become rulers; they are merely exercising their rights and responsibilities as rulers. They are acting as rulers rather than working to become or remain rulers. What is referred to as rest is not regarded as work. If the activity involved in such rest is a work, then it is being called a work from some other perspective than the one which originally labeled it as rest.

#### **Saving Faith is not a Work**

Those who claim that saving faith is a work will respond that such faith may likewise be considered a work in one sense but not another. Some taking this approach have suggested that faith be regarded as an act rather than action, noting that in English we will speak of an *act of faith* but not an *action of faith*. It is assumed that saving faith may be a considered work in a Johannine sense (of Jn 6:29) but not in a Pauline sense (e.g., Rom 3:28; 4:5; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9). To be sure, writers can use words in different ways. But there are at least three problems with regarding saving faith as a work in any normal sense of the word.

First, scripture gives us reason to believe that our thought life in general will indeed be judged in the Pauline sense—whether good or bad. So even if faith is just an *act* rather than an *action*, faith could still be a work in the Pauline sense. Therefore, the distinction between act and action fails since *acts* may be considered work. Second, even the action of baptism is not necessarily considered a work in the Pauline sense. So the distinction between act and action fails when *actions* are considered. Third, Paul's contrast between faith and work presupposes that his Gentile readers would see a natural contrast between the two. If everything we do is naturally considered a work in some broad sense of the word, then the intrinsic nature of Paul's contrast between faith and work is not readily apparent.

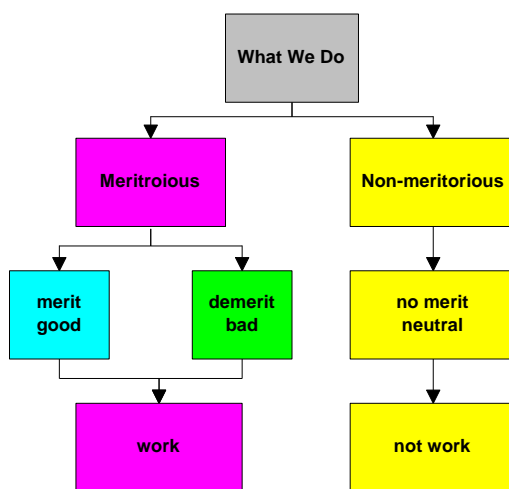
Our argument, therefore, is that a punctiliar thought (such as saving faith) must, by its very nature, not have been considered a work by these Greek speakers in Paul's day. Such faith must have been inherently regarded as non-work by both Paul and his recipients. Certainly, if soteriological faith had any misthological moral value, then Paul's contrast would be incomprehensible. The *act of faith*, if one wishes to call it that, must not have been regarded as a work in Paul's day. If it had been considered a work in some sense by the general populace, then the common sense value of Paul's argument is lost. To use our color system, God takes an act which would normally be intrinsically yellow coded and gives a gift in response. If the Greek speakers of Paul's day had generally considered faith a work in some sense, then Paul's contrast between faith and works would have been considered nonsense.

God does not give us eternal life as a free gift for doing something good in the meritorious sense of the word. We do not merit the free gift of eternal life. So soteriological faith is not a good work. But what is it that makes such faith non-meritorious? Our answer is that a passive, punctiliar, persuasional response is not considered a work either by God or man. Thus, saving faith is not considered meritorious by the one requiring it or the one rendering it. Saving faith is simply not considered a work by the very nature of the fact that it belongs to a class of acts not considered work. But could such faith still be considered a work in some non-meritorious sense of the word? Evidently not. It was not natural for Paul or his listeners to think of such faith as being some form of work; otherwise, Paul's contrast between the faith and work would be unnatural. He assumes that the antonymous relationship is apparent between the two words. By default, faith is not a work.<sup>6</sup>

## Summary

In order to prove their premise that faith is a work, Calvinists utilize conflicting arguments. On the one hand, they will maintain that saving faith is not a meritorious work. On the other hand, they will argue as if everything done to the glory of God is a meritorious work. But these conflicting arguments result in paradoxical contradictions. Such Calvinists have God rewarding all our good works but not rewarding our greatest good work. They erroneously portray God as giving us a gift in response to our greatest good work.

### *Non-Work is Not Work*



The Calvinistic argument that saving faith is a work produced by God takes as its premise the perspective that faith must be a work in some sense of the word because everything is a work in some literal sense of the word. From this premise, it seeks to prove that such faith is a work in the sense of the word demanded by their theology. We find the premise faulty in that saving faith is assumed by Paul and his readers not to be a work. For this reason, it naturally has no misthological value. Soteric faith is not a work in the misthological sense of the word, not merely because it results in a gift but because it is not a work in any normal sense of the word. Saving faith is not a work in the misthological sense because such punctiliar faith is ordinarily not considered a work in any sense.

We agree that everything we do, including coming to saving faith, is to be done to the glory of God. Everything we do is thus to be considered doxologically good, but that does not mean that it is a work. There are many good things we do to God's glory that are not considered works in the meritorious sense or any other normal sense of the word. Such misthologically neutral actions fall within the parameters of God's doxologically moral will. They are morally permissible but not misthologically profitable. Such actions are misthologically amoral. There are many things we do that are not considered work in the Bible. Not everything we do is considered work in any normal sense of the word, nor will it be rewarded as a work in the misthological sense. The intrinsic contrast between faith and work in Paul's writings gives us strong reason to believe that faith (and especially punctiliar faith at that) was not normally considered a work in Paul's day.

Therefore, when Jesus refers to faith as a work in Jn 6:29, it is highly improbable that He is using the word *work* in the normal way. Rather, He is in all likelihood using the word ironically with regard to what the people were doing and metaphorically in regard to what they needed to do.<sup>7</sup> The semantic potentiality in which the word *work* could simply refer to something you do allowed the Lord to make a play on words in which the actuality was that He was speaking ironically and metaphorically. In short, saving faith is not a work in the literal, normal sense of the word. The Calvinistic presuppositions regarding work simply will not work.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, a thoroughgoing Calvinist will even argue that our sin is a work of God. But that consideration lies beyond the scope of our current consideration. We will rather focus on the Calvinistic persuasion that every good thing we do is a good work.

<sup>2</sup> Calvinistic faith is irresistibly and monergistically produced by God.

<sup>3</sup> For his diagram, see Garry Friesen, *Decision Making*, 232. For my more detailed correction of his diagram, see "Duality of Permissive Will" in the *The Outer Darkness*.

<sup>4</sup> Misthologically speaking, neutral actions are amoral and therefore colored in yellow. They form a misthologically amoral subset of doxologically moral acts in that they are good actions that are not rewarded and thus not treated as works. Such amoral actions, even though they are good and glorify God, are not rewarded and thus not considered works. They are not moral actions in the meritorious sense of the word. They are actions that are permissible, but not profitable.

<sup>5</sup> For interaction with Constables notes on amorality in Rom 14:22, see [Amoral Faith](#). For source analysis of amorality, see [Work is Determined by Source](#).

<sup>6</sup> To be sure, faith can be a good work. Paul affirms the existence of misthological faith as well. We fully acknowledge the existence of misthological faith—a blue colored faith that results in rewards. But misthological faith has distinguishing characteristics and different results than soteriological faith. Misthological faith is linear in duration, great in elevation, and active in manifestation. Soteriological faith, in stark contrast, is punctiliar in duration, lacking in elevation, and passive in manifestation. By way of comparison, if misthological faith is a brick wall, then soteriological faith is but a single, solitary brick. A solitary brick is no more a brick wall than soteriological faith is a work. It takes a lot of bricks to make a brick wall, and it takes a lot more than soteriological faith to make a work.

Misthological faith is extraordinary. Saving faith is ordinary. The reason it has no misthological value is because it is so ordinary. A weak faith in a great Savior will take a person all the way to heaven because entrance into heaven is not conditioned on a great faith. A great faith, however, is required to rule as a lord with the Lord in heaven. Rulership is a reward based on works, and great faith is one such work. Entrance into heaven is a gift not based on works, and saving faith is not a work.

<sup>7</sup> For treatment of Jn 6:29, see [Work of God](#).