

Work is Something We Do

Revised 10/25/2009

It has been asserted by some that a work is *anything/everything* we do.¹ From this premise, it is reasoned by those of this mindset that faith must always be a work in some sense of the word. Those maintaining this position may even assert that the gift of eternal life is a reward and thus use the oxymoron *reward-gift* to describe the gift that is given to us when we respond in saving faith.

1. Work is *anything* we do (e.g., Jn 6:28-29).
2. Faith is *something* we do (e.g., Acts 16:30).
3. Therefore, faith is a work (e.g., Jn 6:28-29).

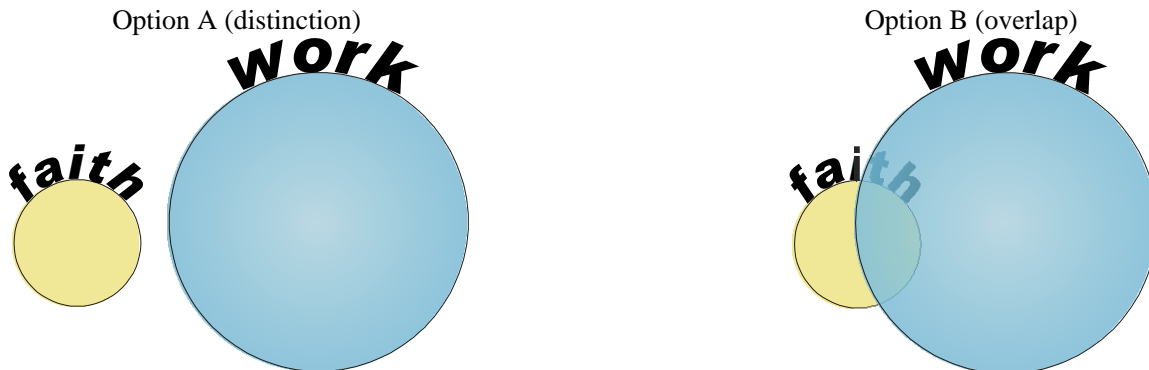
Following this logic, it is asserted that faith is a subset of work, at least in the broadest sense of the word *work*. In other words, when the word *work* is expanded to its broadest semantic range to encompass anything and everything we do, those following this rational insist that faith is a work. When asked how it is that faith is not a work in other passages, advocates of this outlook respond that such faith is a nonmeritorious work or that it is supernaturally produced and therefore not something *we* do. But it would still be necessary to explain why a supernaturally produced faith is considered a meritorious work resulting in reward in some passages but not others.² A better proposal exists.



Now certainly we will agree with the above syllogism in that both works and faith are something *we do*. But this does not mean that *everything* we do is work. The major premise of the above syllogism is absurd. A more reasonable syllogism would be:

1. Work is *something* we do.
2. Faith is *something* we do.
3. Therefore, faith is *sometimes* a work.

Not everything we do is work. Not everything we do is faith. This realistically leaves us with two possibilities. Faith and works are both something we do, but (A) they are never one-and-the-same or (B) sometimes faith may be considered a work.



We have chosen *Option B* because faith is a passive result that we are expected to actively produce which may result in a reward.³ A passive work is something produced by active work. Such passive works are pictured as being rewardable (1Cor 3:13-15). Since faith is sometimes rewarded, it is sometimes regarded as a work. Everything we do which results in a reward is a work. Nothing we do which results in a gift is a work. **From the perspective of outcome in terms of gift versus reward, everything we do that results in a reward is a work.** Hence, a work is anything we do that results in a reward. Therefore, we choose semantic overlap rather than thoroughgoing distinction as being the best picture of the relationship between faith and works.

¹ The NIV translation of Rom 2:6 is used by those who take the subset approach since the NIV takes the more generic and comprehensive rendering of *ergon* as something which we do: "God will give to each person according to what he has *done* (*ergon*)."¹ Consequently, subset advocates read the verse as if it said that God will reward us according to *all* that we have done. In doing so, they read their theology into the text. The text does not say *all*, and the context itself suggests that the reward is limited to things which we do which are good and bad (Rom 2:7-10). Amoral actions would therefore not be considered works. *Ergon* is better rendered as *work* to denote the subset of what we have done which have misthological consequences. This is not to say that we would object to the standard rendering of *done* for *prasso* in 2Cor 5:10. But let it be noted that the verse itself supplies the limitation when it says that each one will "be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has *done*, *whether good or bad*." The clarification *whether good or bad* is obscured by the NIV in Rom 2:6. Not everything we do is rewardable, only those things which are good or bad. Things we do amorally do not count misthologically. Similar comments might be made for texts such as Col 3:35 which says, "He who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has *done* (*adikeo*)."² God will reward good with good and bad with bad. This does not mean that everything we do is good or bad. See [Amoral Faith](#) and [Doxological Versus Misthological Amoralty](#).

² For our response to source considerations, see [Work is Determined by Source](#).

³ The semantic overlap between faith and works as something we do realistically nullifies *Option A* since faith may sometimes be rewarded. See [What is Work](#).