

Will Good Works be the Reason or the Evidence at the Final Accounting?

The word “because” sometimes works differently from the word “for”. Those interested in grammar will say that “because” introduces another principal clause, which gives the reason for the previous statement. However, there is another difference sometimes. It does not always give the reason for previous statement. Sometimes it gives corroborating evidence instead. Take these examples.

A. Enter the kingdom, because God has prepared it for you from the foundation of the world and because you have believed in Jesus the Saviour.

B. Enter the kingdom, for God has prepared it for you from the foundation of the world. For you have also believed in Jesus the Saviour.

C. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat.

In C for introduces corroborating evidence. Another example should make this clear. We can say:

B. The pumpkin vines are withered. For it is hot this afternoon.

C. It is hot this afternoon. For the pumpkin vines are withered.

Of course, the withered pumpkin vines are not the reason for the heat of the afternoon. C asks the hearer to contemplate the effects of the heat.

Jesus used the word “for” in a similar way when He referred to a woman with a bad reputation who wet His feet with her tears and poured perfume on them when He was the guest at the house of Simon, a Pharisee. He said: *“I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven. For she has loved very much”* (Lk 7:47). People can’t see the forgiveness of sins, but they can see the effects of it. What He meant is brought out clearly by the way the *Good News Bible* translates this: *“The great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven.”* Salvation is not by works, even though a number of passages in Scripture speak of a judgment according to works. Salvation is by God’s grace alone, received through faith alone, without works. Works are the evidence that people can see that faith is there. They cannot see faith or forgiveness. In Jesus’ description of the final accounting, it is obvious that the righteous are astonished that Jesus refers to things they have done to Him. Their attitude to Jesus Himself is basic, and that is what their works supply the evidence for.

Good works always accompany a living faith. Faith is such a strong and active thing that it has done the good works before it is even aware of them, as the natural and proper response to God for His grace. The works the righteous have done draw attention to the fact that their lives have been determined by their attitude to Jesus Christ. The good works Jesus mentions are only a sample. But they serve to illustrate a very important point. We don’t have to go out of our usual lives and do something special or extraordinary to do good works. Even the humblest acts we do for each other and for others all count, and God will point to those who cannot see faith in the heart on that great day to show that His judgment is just. Only the Judge knows the hearts of people. All that others can see are the consequences. If the works have been done out of faith in Christ, they have been done to Him. They are the evidence, not the reason.