

Salvation is by grace alone through faith in Jesus. Period.

There is nothing we can *do* to earn that. Think about it...if there was even *one* thing we could do to save ourselves, then Jesus would not have needed to come to Earth and sacrifice himself. Jesus died because there was *no other way* for us to save ourselves. So only through our faith in Jesus can we enter into Heaven.

Now that we have that out of the way, there is the need to emphasize that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17). We are called by Jesus to do acts of kindness. However, we are not to do these acts to lift ourselves up. In fact, we are to do these things in secret! Matthew 6:3-4 tells us, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Sometimes we do things that we don't think counts. We don't think we're successful in our attempts to make a difference. However, we learn that God sees these things we do, even if no one else notices. Jesus taught us the way to please him – by doing those things that help our neighbors – “in secret”. That said, we also see that the Pharisees were always doing the “right thing”. They would pray, fast and give alms to the poor. But Jesus tells us that if our righteousness does not surpass that of the Pharisees, we will not see the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

So, it's not the actions that please God, it's the heart. Are you doing these things because you want a reward or because you have so much love for people and for Jesus that you are compelled to help? The only way we will fulfill this command is by first growing closer in our relationship to Jesus. Give him your love and your life and the works you do will come naturally and be pleasing to you and Him.