

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Salvation is man's most pressing need. All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). The just reward for our sin is death and damnation (Rom. 6:23). We dare not ask for justice. We desperately need mercy.

Experience teaches that man is incapable of saving himself from sin's ruin. If we expect to become righteous by our own achievement we are reminded, "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). If we attempt to earn salvation by good works of morality and religion, we learn that it is "not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves..." that man is saved (Tit. 3:5). Would we justify ourselves by an attempt to keep God's law perfectly, we will learn that "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight..." (Rom. 3:20). Should we by human wisdom set out to find right-standing before God, we are told that "the world through its wisdom knew not God" (I Cor. 1:21). Without Christ, a sinner is alienated from God's people, a stranger to the covenants of promise, without God and without hope (Eph. 2:12). In this pitiful plight, we cry out, "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" And the answer comes ringing across the ages, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24-25a).

We Can Be Saved By Grace

The good news of the gospel can be summed up in the words of Paul to the Ephesians, "for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God..." (Eph. 2:8). Grace means a free and unmerited gift or favor. "The New Testament writers use "*charis*" preeminently of that kindness by which God bestows favor even upon the ill-deserving and grants to sinners pardon of their offences and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ" (J. H. Thayer, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 666). Grace is God's part in our salvation. Faith is our response to God's grace.

"God Is Love"

God's grace springs from his loving nature (I John 4:8). The God of love sent his son to save us from punishment (John 3:16). When the grace of God appeared (i.e., Jesus) bringing salvation to all men, he instructed us as to God's will for our lives (Tit. 2:11-12). Through "the gospel of the grace of God," the inspired apostles made known to us the conditions of our forgiveness (Acts 20:24). By grace God gave us his holy church to see that each person has opportunity to be saved and to provide a proper environment for the saved on earth (Heb.12:28). The grace of our Lord has prepared for us an infallible record (the Bible) on which to base our faith and by which to order our lives. This "word of his grace...is able to build (us) up and give (us) the inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

God's grace offers salvation to all people regardless of their race or record. The Lord is "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). All earthlings can rejoice that "the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Tit. 2:11).

Salvation By Grace Is Conditional

God saves us by grace, but we do not read of salvation by grace alone. Numerous teachers have erred at this vital point. Scripture makes it plain that **God's offer of grace is conditioned on our faithful response** to his will. Hear Paul: "For by grace have ye been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). If salvation were by grace alone, since grace is extended to all, literally all would be saved: even those who did not wish to be. Vile sinners and rebels would populate heaven along with God's faithful servants. Such universalism is untenable.

God has determined that we play a part in our salvation. Peter exhorted the men of Jerusalem to "save yourselves" (Acts 2:40). In the words of Paul, man's part is to have faith or to believe on the Lord (Eph. 2:8). We are "justified freely by his grace...through faith in his blood..." (Rom. 3:25).

What Is Saving Faith?

A common mistake in the religious world is misunderstanding the Biblical meaning of faith. This does more than cause inconvenience; it can be fatal. We must look to God's word for the proper meaning. Saving faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Religious convictions based on human opinions, traditions and doctrines do not qualify. Biblical faith is living and obedient. Nothing avails "but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). Thus, Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him (Heb. 5:9). Salvation by grace is received by obedient faith! James labels "faith only" as dead and worthless (Jas. 2:24, 26). We see a Biblical demonstration of saving faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The author in numerous examples vividly portrays faith as a trusting heart gladly obeying God's will. Noah and his family were saved from destruction because he, "moved with godly fear, prepared an ark...and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Heb. 11:7). The same kind of faith saves us today.

Obedient faith does not attempt to earn or merit salvation. It is evident that we cannot save ourselves. God paid the price and offers us salvation freely upon the condition that we believe in his son and obey his will. Some object that to do anything beyond mental acceptance is to attempt to earn our salvation. Should I offer to send you a coupon for a wonderful gift, free upon the condition that you send me a stamped, self-addressed envelope, surely you would not claim you earned or merited the favor you received. So it is in salvation. Through Christ, God offers free salvation to all who believe and are baptized (Mark 16:16). Those whose faith leads them to do so are saved (Acts 22:16). They in no way place God under obligation. They are simply claiming his gracious offer. This helps us understand Philippians 2:12 which says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

We Are Not Saved By Works Done In Our Own Righteousness

Our salvation is not of ourselves, not of works, lest any one should boast (Eph. 2:8-9). In every age there have been folks who thought they could achieve salvation by their own efforts. Scripture presents two classic cases for our learning. The proud Pharisaic Jews sought to be justified by the works of the Law of Moses. While acknowledging their zeal for God, Paul wrote of them: "For being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). Sophisticated Gentile philosophers thought that they could attain salvation by human reason. The same apostle comments that they, "Professing themselves to be wise...became fools" and fell into gross idolatry, "wherefore God gave them up..." (Rom. 1:22-24). The greatest minds "in their wisdom knew not God." They became foolish in the attempt (I Cor. 1:20-21). Tragically, men are yet trying to save themselves with no better success. Every attempt of man to establish a new kind of church or to introduce a new doctrine or demand in religion is a vain attempt to do it "our way." Such is doomed to failure. Attempts of sinners to somehow mitigate their vices by great deeds of charity or benevolence have precisely the same internal flaw. Beneficial as these deeds may be to the recipients, they have no saving power. But, they can be fatal to the man trusting in them, for they may lull him into the vain hope that God will be obligated to treat him kindly. Thus he will fail to accept God's grace on the terms offered

The Ephesians Were Saved By Grace

Paul reminded the Ephesians Christians of their salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:4-8). If we do what they did, we too can enjoy the same blessing. They "heard the word of the truth, the gospel of (their) salvation, in whom, having also believed, (they) were sealed ...with the Holy Spirit..." (Eph. 1:13). They were taught the necessity of repentance toward God (Acts 20:21). "And when they heard this they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). By doing as they did we too will be saved by grace through faith. We must be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10) else we will have received his grace in vain (II Cor. 6:1). Be assured that "God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work" (II Cor. 9:8).

It is the supreme discovery of life that we need not punish ourselves in a hopeless effort to earn God's forgiveness. It is freely offered to all. We must gladly accept his gift of love on the terms offered. A grateful heart will make the best effort to please him. No longer do we as criminals seek by our own strength to escape our chains, rather as faithful children we do our best to please our loving Father. JHW