

Saved By Grace

Is there any place for religious works in God's plan of Redemption?

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A TV pastor of a large city church preached an eloquent message on “grace” and several times the congregation applauded his message with enthusiastic handclapping. What was his theme? “Grace was all God’s doing and all man can do is believe and confess Jesus is Lord.” He kept repentance and faith in a hazy background. After hearing this message I concluded saving faith passively accepts certain Biblical truths. By accepting the doctrine of Christ’s death and resurrection they are eternally saved. At a later time in their Christian walk they can make Christ Lord of their lives. *This is error. We do not make Christ Jesus Lord: He is Lord!* The biblical text was:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

What is the Apostle Paul saying in this verse?

Salvation is past tense – the Greek text says “*you are having been saved*” is not a future achievement or reward, but a present reality. You are either saved or you are not.

Salvation is solely by grace. It is not a passive gift of God whereby He accepts unrepentant sinners. The accepted definition of grace (*charis*) is God’s unmerited favor; His undeserved kindness, a feeling of gratitude, thanks. One writer said grace was God allowing an unworthy sinner to come into His Holy Presence. God initiates the action not man.

Salvation is “through faith. Like grace, faith is not passive or static.” Not only salvation, but everything received from God is through faith. *Heb. 11:6 says: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

Faith can be a noun or a verb, but the difference in English is not obvious. If faith (pistis) is a noun it is static, but if it is a verb (pisteuo) it acts. Faith in Eph. 2:8 is pisteos, a verb meaning a firm conviction producing a full acknowledgment of God’s revelation or truth, a personal surrender to Him, a conduct inspired by such surrender (Vine’s Exp. Dict.). Saving faith is more than just mentally accepting certain facts. It is inseparable from repentance, willful surrender and a desire to obey.

Although salvation is God's gift it can only be received by a faith that is more than just understanding and confessing a truth. *Faith believes so strongly it acts upon what is believed* otherwise it isn't biblical faith.

Several needy people heard Jesus and believed what He said and then acted on what they heard and believed. He told them: "Your faith (actions) made you whole." In relation to God faith is a firm conviction producing a full acceptance of God's truth, a personal surrender to Him and a conduct inspired by such surrender. *Repentance (metanoia = to think after) recognizes one's absolute sinfulness and turning from self and sin to God (1 Thess. 1:9)*. It is the "grace of God brings repentance."

The apostle James contrasts the difference between a mental faith without works and a heart faith with works. James. 2:14-19 says, "Can faith save him?" Thus faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead? But someone will say, you have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith *without your works*, and I will show you my faith *by my works*."(Jas 2:14-19).

For example: Satan fulfills the requirements for joining most churches today. He strongly believes in the Deity of Christ, His death, burial and bodily resurrection. He knows how to be saved and he doesn't doubt any part of God's Word, but he isn't saved. Why? He won't repent, submit and obey God's Word. Think of it! He'll spend all eternity in the lake of fire believing in Christ and the Word.

The primary difference between believing teachings about Christ and making Him LORD is *obedience*. There is an old theological debate called "*Lordship Salvation*." Proponents of this novel theory teach a sinner can confess Jesus as Savior and be eternally saved without repenting or making Him Lord. They say repentance is "works" and according to Eph. 2:8-10 works is not required for salvation. Making Jesus Lord can come at a later time.

However Jesus said: "*If you love Me you will keep My commandments*," all of them and not just the ones you like. Obedience is not legalism; it is the true evidence of believing. Judaism had the Law, priesthood, sacrifices and ceremonies and they believed they were righteous because they were Jews who kept the Torah. Paul said they tried to establish own righteousness and missed God's righteousness. Jesus

told the self-righteous Law keeping Pharisees they washed the out side of the cup but the inside was still dirty.

Grace and only grace brings salvation.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (but grace doesn’t stop with bringing salvation) it teaches us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”(Titus 2:11-14). This isn’t legalism or religious works striving to earn salvation; it is grace molding the believer into a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). The same grace, which saves us also sanctifies and conforms us into Christ’s image. Grace teaches us:

(1) To deny ungodliness, (2) To deny worldly lusts, (3) To live soberly, (4) To live righteously, (5) To live godly, (6) To live righteously and (7) To look for the second coming. When a person believes they are really born again by God’s grace these seven manifestations or demonstrations of their faith are evident

Paul told the Roman Jews man is saved by faith alone and not their religious acts of righteousness, while James said undemonstrated faith could not save. James wrote to Jews who rested completely on their legal obedience to the Law for their righteousness so he told them their mental assurance could not save them. Paul informed the Jews they must be saved by faith and not their works.

Paul’s advice to Titus (2:12-14) agrees with James’s letter. If one is convinced they *have been saved*, not *IN* but *FROM* sin, they will live accordingly. Otherwise they don’t really believe they *have been saved*. Continuing with Eph. 2:8, verse 9 says “not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, *FOR GOOD WORKS, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*”

Those who continue living in the bondage of sin, even though they may verbally confess Christianity, are not saved from either the penalty or the power of sin. Why? Their actions prove they don’t really believe they have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:13).

How long must this faith continue? It continues *until Jesus comes*. Grace abounds until the trumpet sounds and the dead saints are resurrected and the living saints are changed. Remember! God's goal isn't to save you from hell, but to fully conform you into the likeness of Christ.

Does God ever warn believers about future judgment?

The Lord commanded each of the seven churches in Asia to *repent* and change their thinking and actions. He warned the church in Sardis if they repented He would not *blot its name from the book of life*;

The pastors of these seven churches shepherded believing members. When each one was saved and made Christ Jesus the Lord of their lives they were added to His church. No one arbitrarily joins the Body of Christ; they must be born from above, and then the Lord adds them to His church.

This church had grown cold and complacent. "You have a name you are alive, but you are dead." Why? The Lord said. "I have not found your works perfect before God. (*Remember: faith without corresponding actions is dead faith*). Therefore, remember how you have received and heard, hold fast and repent." Then He warns them. "If you don't repent I'll blot your names out of the book of life." If this is impossible because they once accepted Jesus as Savior why warn them they are in danger of being cast aside? One media preacher falsely said: "After confessing Christ no matter what you do, even if you deny the Lord himself, you are still saved and a child of God." That is not what Paul warned. "Examine yourself as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Cor. 13:5). If it is impossible to lose one's position why examine yourself to see if Christ Jesus is really in you or you have been disqualified? Remember, faith trusts in and strongly adheres to what Grace brought and believing they have been saved from sin they live as new creatures waiting for Christ's glorious appearing. Remember: demons believe and tremble knowing they are lost.

If I deeply believe I'm saved *from* and not *in* sin, *then* the power of darkness is broken (Col. 2:13; 1 Jn. 3:9). Christ not only died to pay the penalty for overt sins such as adultery, lying, stealing or murder, but also the terrible sin of neglecting the Lord Himself. Gen. 1:26 says God created man so man could enjoy intimate fellowship with Him. How can one say, "I am a child of God" and have no time for Him?

If we won't pray and obey His written commands He is *not* Lord. If we won't obey His written Word how can we obey His inner voice to guide us moment by moment? Our degree of rebellion is measured by our neglect of His Word and fellowship in prayer. The more time we spend in His Presence, the more we become like Him and we are changed into His image and that pleases the Father.

AWAKE sleeping saints lest the Lord come and catch you unprepared like the foolish virgins. He is coming for those who earnestly LOOK for His appearing, an active believing remnant. *Laying aside every weight is not legalism; it is running the race to win.* Christ saves you from the penalty of sin; He gives the Holy Spirit to empower you and He mediates a new covenant written on our inner man as we look unto Jesus and wait for His appearing. Grace gave you salvation and the same grace causes you to repent from all evil and grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ, God's pattern Son.