

1950

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Eugene S., "Salvation By Grace" (1950). *Stone-Campbell Books*. 505.
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Salvation
By
Grace



By
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SALVATION BY GRACE

By EUGENE S. SMITH

Of all the great doctrines of the Bible, none is more capable of arousing the appreciation of man than the idea suggested by the words of the apostle Paul in Eph. 2:8, 9, where he says, "for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory." In this statement the kindness and love of God is revealed to such extent that we should be eternally grateful to God and in our appreciation should humbly submit to His will in all things.

Christ, of course, is the manifestation of the grace of God. In him the love of God is shown as he was presented as the perfect sacrifice for sin. This sacrifice was "not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy" (Tit. 3:5). Nothing good that we had done was or could be sufficient to merit the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. This was the unmerited favor of God to lost and dying man. This was "the kindness of God our Saviour, and His love toward man" (Tit. 3:5), that appeared for our redemption from a curse which was too great for us to lift.

This grace of God was not bestowed on "the few" but rather on "the many." Paul said in Tit. 2:11, "For the grace

of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." All were in need of a Saviour and when God gave His Son He made him a "propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (I John 2:2). When we look upon Jesus today we behold the one whom God "crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

Therefore by the unmerited manifestation of the goodness and kindness of God our love for him is born and kept alive. John said, "We love, because he first loved us" (I John 4:19). The great love of God which was manifest to the world in the death of Christ is enough to ever keep us humble and grateful before the throne of God for the great gift was made while we were yet sinners and was therefore strictly by the grace and love of God. Paul said of this in Rom. 5:8, "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Enough has been said, therefore, to cause us to realize that it is by grace we are saved.

An Oft-Made Mistake

However, in thinking of the doctrine of Salvation by Grace there is a mistake often made that leads to the wrong conclusion. Some have supposed that the fact that salvation is by grace has precluded and excluded all response on our part. Some have argued

that since it is by "grace" there is nothing we can do in any way in the matter of our salvation. These arguments are usually summed up under three headings which are erroneously based on the text of Eph. 2:8. They are: (1) Salvation being of grace there is nothing we can do toward that salvation; (2) It being the gift of God there is nothing we can do to receive it; and (3) It being "not of works" we are excluded from doing anything whatsoever to receive it. Believing the above thoughts to be entirely wrong and based upon a mistaken understanding of the text we want to examine them very carefully in the light of God's word.

Does Grace Exclude Obedience?

Some have supposed that grace excludes obedience to the commandments of God but this cannot be for it would make of God's word a mass of contradictions and we know this is not so. Christ said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Christ in this verse and in the illustration of the two builders (Matt. 7:24-27), which follows, makes clear to all that obedience to God's will is an essential pre-requisite of salvation.

The apostle Paul, in speaking along this line, has very clearly said, "He (Christ) became unto all them that

obey him the author of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9). Peter said, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth" (I Pet. 1:22) and the beloved John said "This is the love of God that we keep his commandments" (I John 5:3). Therefore it is impossible to suppose that grace excludes obedience. Nay, rather grace demands obedience for in view of the wonderful manifestation of the love of God we should gladly humble our hearts before Him and do His will, obeying His commandments which are given to us in His word. Any course other than this would be contrary to the scriptures and to common sense. We must obey God, obey the truth, or keep His commandments for thus we show our love for Him.

Does A Gift Exclude Obedience?

Some have likewise supposed that since salvation is a gift we can do nothing to receive it. Now to say we can do nothing to merit it is one thing and to say that we can do nothing to receive it is quite another thing. I realize that nothing we can do will ever give us merit enough to make God owe us salvation as a debt He must pay. It is not in this respect that we speak of our obedience. It is not that we are to do a thing or things to merit salvation but we must, according to the word of God, do certain things that we may receive salvation.

Christ says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:

16). If we are to receive the "gift of God" we must then "believe and be baptized." Some will accept the idea that we must believe but will reject the companion thought that we must be baptized. These two, belief and baptism, are joined together by the conjunction "and." One of the elementary rules of the English language is that this conjunction joins words or phrases of equal rank or importance. Therefore when it is used to join belief and baptism it makes them of equal importance.

The gift of salvation from Christ is held forth to man and he says it will be bestowed upon the man who "believeth and is baptized." If anyone answers that to believe and be baptized is to make it no longer a gift he is surely mistaken about that for the Bible cannot be a book of contradictions. But think one moment about this. If I were to say to you, "Write me a letter and I will give you a book" you could understand the meaning of my words. If you then wrote me the letter would that in any way show that you had earned the book. No, for when you had complied with my request the book would still be received as a gift and not something you had earned.

A Bible Illustration

To illustrate the fact that one can obey the commands of God and still receive his blessings as a gift we turn to the sixth chapter of Joshua to study

the illustration set forth. These things "happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition" (I Cor. 10:11). They are given that in them we may see and learn God's way of dealing with the sons of men in the earth. Paul tells us this again in Rom. 15:4, where he says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." Therefore we can, by studying the examples of Israel in the Old Testament, learn of God's dealing with man even today. Not that the Old Testament is to be considered our law but the examples thereof are valuable to us as warnings.

"Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in" (Josh. 6:1). This was the condition of the city as the children of Israel under Joshua's leadership encamped before the city. Then in verse 2 God talks with Joshua in the following words, "See, I have given into thy hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor." The city of Jericho was a gift of God to Joshua and the children of Israel.

However God did not end His speaking with His statement that He would give them the city. He went on to say, "And Ye shall compass the city, all the men of war, going about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets

of rams' horns before the ark: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And it shall be, that, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall go up every man straight before him" (Josh. 6:3-6).

Now if Joshua had been like some people today he would have said "Not so Lord for if we do all that thou hast commanded we shall earn the city and it will not and cannot be a gift." That is the way people sometimes talk today when obedience to the commandments of God is emphasized by gospel preachers. People are wont to cry, "If we do anything it cannot be a gift." In this they make a serious mistake that will finally result in the condemnation of millions for failing to do the will of the Lord.

Joshua, however, being a man of faith, did not so speak. He immediately marshalled his forces as God had commanded and began to fulfill those commandments of Jehovah. All that the Lord had said was done in just the way that the Lord had said it should be done. When they came to the seventh day of their obedience we hear Joshua speaking again to the children of Israel as the priests blew the ram's horn trumpet according to God's commandment. He said, "Shout; for Jehovah

hath given you the city" (Josh. 6:16). Therefore it must be forever settled and known that men can obey God's commandments and still receive the promised blessing as a "gift of God."

More than this in our contemplation of God's gift to man we must remember that Paul said it was "By grace through Faith" (Eph. 2:8). This is God's gift and it is received "through faith." Now let us note another similarity between this gift of God and the one we have been studying in Joshua. We read in Hebrews 11:30, "By faith the wall of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days." Here then is a further confirmation of the necessity of our obedience of God's commandments if we are to be saved by grace.

The salvation by grace is through faith. The walls of Jericho fell down by faith. However they did not fall by faith till God's commandments were obeyed and therefore we do not receive the blessing of God's grace till our obedience to God's will of today is complete. Then, and then only, can we receive the blessing by faith for until our obedience is rendered before God our faith is dead and vain and can never bring the blessing of God.

Does Grace Exclude Works?

Now we come to the final objection of those who would reject obedience to God as having anything to do with our salvation. They cry "it is not of works"

and thus would turn many away from doing the will of God. Let me say first of all that this limitation cannot be understood in an absolute sense, that is to say, prohibiting all works of any kind, for that would cause the apostle to contradict himself in the two verses with which we began this study.

Paul says of this salvation by grace that it is "through faith" and then goes on to say it is "not of works." Now I know that he does not mean by this that all works are excluded for to do that would even exclude faith. The Christ himself hath said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (John 6:29). God has commanded men to believe and Christ says this is a work that is commanded of God; a work that men are to do. Therefore as salvation is "through faith" we cannot exclude all works or we would thereby even exclude faith. This we know cannot be.

Moreover, we know that "works of righteousness" are not excluded by Paul's statement for we hear the apostle Peter speaking to Cornelius and his household in the city of Caesarea and these were to be the first converts from among the gentiles. As he preached to them we hear him say, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34, 35). Therefore the "works

of righteousness, do have something to do with our being accepted of God. In Titus 3:5 as we have already noted they had nothing to do with God sending His son but now that the grace of God has been manifested to the world in the son we are acceptable in the sight of God as we "work righteousness."

Working righteousness is obeying the commandments of God for the commandments of God are His righteousness. We read this in Psa. 119:172, where David says, "All thy commandments are righteousness." Therefore it is evident that to "work righteousness" is to "work God's commandments." Therefore it is on the basis of our obedience to the commandments of God that we are acceptable in the sight of God and our obedience to God's commandments is not the thing under consideration by Paul when he said in Eph. 2:9, "Not of works."

Moreover Christ has said that our "works of righteousness," that is our obedience to God's commandments, is nothing about which we can boast or glory. He says, "Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). In obeying God's commands and receiving His blessing we have nothing to boast about. The children of Israel could not boast about their capture of Jericho. God's way was not the way

that would create boasting on their part but rather a way that would increase their faith in and respect for Him.

Had the children of Israel captured the city by force of arms they might have later boasted about it but taking it as they did they could never glory in it but must always give glory to God. Likewise in our obedience to Christ's commandments we can never glory for who could say that believing in the Christ, repenting of our sins, confessing our faith in Christ and being baptized could ever be enough to "earn" for us the glory of heaven. Nay, rather, it only emphasizes our dependence upon the mercy and grace of God. Therefore as we obey and when we have done all things commanded we are unprofitable and it is still by God's grace that we are saved. However it is evident that his grace does not exclude the "works of righteousness" which he has commanded us to do.

What then can be the meaning of Paul's statement, "not of works." It is very simple, and as usual in God's word, we find it in the very sentence we are considering. Notice, please, that Paul says, "not of works, that no man should glory" (Eph. 2:9). The King James version says "boast" instead of "glory" as we find it in the American Standard Version. This is the key of the entire matter, it is not of works that we can glory in or boast about. It is not by works that we earn salvation or

place God in debt to us. This is the entire meaning of the apostle's words and when we thus consider the matter we can see that some works are excluded but that the "works of righteousness" are not excluded but are the obedience of faith by which we are to receive the "gift of God." Therefore it is important that we obey the commandments of Jesus that he may be the author of eternal salvation to our souls as he is to all them that obey him (Heb. 5:8, 9).

The Ephesian Example

Now in conclusion we want to remember that our text for this study was written to members of the church in Ephesus. These were said to be saved by "grace through faith" so if we can learn what they did and how they were saved it will be of great importance to us in our study. Let us therefore turn our attention to the nineteenth chapter of Acts where we read of the establishment of this church and in this record learn of the conversion of the Ephesians.

"And it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found certain disciples: and he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? And they said unto him, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given. And he said, Into what then were ye baptized? and they

said, Into John's baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is on Jesus. And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:1-5).

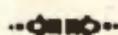
In this account we have the beginning of the church in Ephesus. These are the people to whom Paul wrote, "By grace have ye been saved through faith." Therefore it is evident that Paul's conception of salvation by grace did not exclude obedience to God's commands. Nay, contrary to that, it so emphasized obedience to Christ that when he found these who had been one time baptized but with an improper faith he taught them the truth and they were baptized again. Therefore these were baptized twice, once wrong and once right, and still were saved by grace.

There are hundreds of thousands in this land of ours who are like those at Ephesus. They have been baptized but did not understand the true significance and meaning of it at the time. Their baptism is invalid and they like the Ephesians should be baptized with the baptism commanded by Christ. That is they should be baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to receive the remission of their sins for this is the baptism commanded by the Lord and therefore the baptism

in His name (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16).

There are other hundreds of thousands who have never been baptized. These need to believe in Christ with all their hearts (Acts 8:36, 37), repent of their sins (Acts 17:30), confess their faith in the Christ (Rom. 10:10), and be baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3) unto the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Thus they would in their obedience to the commands of the Christ have him become the author of eternal salvation to their souls. Thus they would "work righteousness" and become acceptable in the sight of God. Thus they would "by faith" receive "the gift of God" the salvation of their souls and as children of God "by faith in Christ Jesus" rejoice in the sweet assurance of salvation by and through the grace of God for "as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27) and since "in Christ" the grace of God is made known and bestowed they would be saved "by grace through faith."

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