

Salvation By Faith But Not By Faith Only

by Batsell Barrett Baxter

Salvation is by God's grace. It is a gift from God, motivated by his love for us, and is provided through Jesus Christ. Grace means "unmerited favor." Salvation is an unearned, undeserved blessing, offered freely to all mankind, and made possible by the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. In short, there was no way that man, the sinner, could earn or merit salvation, so God provided it for him as a gift. This is the Good News of the Gospel.

One of the clearest statements of this theme is from the pen of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:8-9, where he said, "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." This passage emphasizes that salvation is God's gift - a matter of grace. It would be impossible to overemphasize the fact that salvation is a gift from God - a matter of grace.

SALVATION BY FAITH

In Ephesians 2:8-9, mentioned above, there are several key words, two of which stand out. The first is grace, the unmerited favor of God which provides salvation as a gift for all men. The second key word is faith, which is man's response to God's free gift. Salvation is by grace - on God's side; and by faith - on man's side.

Now it becomes very important for us to understand what faith means. Exactly what is meant by faith? Many people define faith as a mental acceptance of certain facts. That is historical faith and we have historical faith about many things. We believe, for example, that certain cities exist and that certain people have lived though we have neither seen the cities nor known the people. That kind of faith, however, is not sufficient to save a man. The devils believe and shudder (James 2:19), but they will not be saved. Saving faith is something beyond the mental acceptance of the existence of God and of Christ. It is that, but it is more.

The theme of the book of Romans is "salvation by faith." When we study Romans we discover that faith meant, to the apostle Paul, a mental acceptance of the existence of God and Christ, plus an active commitment of his life. When a man has faith he not only believes, but also invests himself in Christ. The clearest way to convey Paul's meaning is to read a phrase from the opening sentence of Romans and another from the closing sentence. In the opening sentence we find the expression "unto obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5). Paul emphasized faith throughout the sixteen chapters which make up the book. It is obedient faith" (Romans 16:26). We are saved by grace, to which we must respond in obedient faith (Rom. 16:26). Grace is God's part and faith is our part. Faith, in order to be saving faith, includes within itself the obedience which

God asks of us.

We are disturbed by those whose interpretation of faith leads them to preach, in many pulpits across the land and on many radio and television programs, that all one must do in order to be saved is to believe in one's heart. The emphasis often made is that whenever a person believes in the Lord and mentally commits himself to the Lord, he is immediately saved. Sometimes this is called "being born again," and is described as having happened while riding on an airplane, or on one's knees in prayer, or while facing some special trial of life. This interpretation of faith, commonly held by many people, is not the interpretation of faith reflected in the pages of the inspired Scriptures. Biblical faith is an obedient faith.

GRACE AND FAITH

What is the relation of grace and faith? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Both elements are in this passage - God's gift and man's response. Later in that same chapter there is this additional sentence, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). In this sentence, believing is the positive side, while its opposite is disobedience, the negative side.

Salvation is God's gift; there can be no question about that. But, the gift must be appropriated by man's response in obedient faith. Grace makes salvation possible; obedient faith makes salvation actual. When man responds in Biblical faith to God's offer of salvation, he is neither earning nor deserving the gift, but only accepting it on the condition on which the Lord has promised to give it.

In this connection let us also read 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9: ". . . To you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might." Notice that the vengeance of the Lord at the time of judgment will be rendered against: (1) Those that know not God, and (2) Those that obey not the gospel. These passages obviously indicate that obedience to the commands of God is imperative if one expects to be saved eternally.

Do not misunderstand this emphasis upon obedience. We do not earn salvation, but we must comply with the conditions laid down by the Lord in order to receive the free gift of eternal salvation. Christ said, "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). Man cannot earn salvation through works of merit, but he must comply with the conditions that the Lord laid down in order to receive the gift of salvation.

NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF CONVERSION

In the book of Acts there are eight major conversions, given as models for all people of all time. In every case the gospel of Christ was preached, the people believed in their hearts, but they did not stop there. Their faith led them to make known their faith in some manner (confessing Christ as their Savior) and then they were baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

As an example, let's notice the beginning of the church on Pentecost, at which time 3,000 were saved. It all began with the preaching of a great sermon concerning Christ by the apostle Peter. Then we read, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ... And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about 3,000 souls" (Acts 2:37-38; 40-41). Obedient faith is demonstrated very clearly in this example: They heard the gospel of Christ, they believed it, at which point they asked what they must then do. Peter told them to repent of their sins and to be baptized. When they had made their faith in Christ actual by obeying the conditions upon which salvation is given, the Scripture then tells us that they were added to the church or family of God. The same pattern is found in each of the other stories of conversion.

We are saved by grace - on God's side; we are saved by faith - on man's side. But Biblical faith is more than mere belief. It is more than an intellectual commitment. It involves obedience: confession of Christ before men (Matthew 10:32-33), repentance for our sins (Luke 13:3), and baptism for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38).