

GRACE, FAITH, AND OBEDIENCE: THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL

The Bible teaches that salvation and fellowship with God go hand-in-hand. Those who are not saved from the wrath of God will also be away “from the presence of the Lord” forever (2 Thess. 1:6-10)! The salvation of our souls is our most pressing need, seeing as “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a). It is the case that we all deserve condemnation from God on the coming day of judgment. We dare not ask for justice! We should plead for grace!

We have this as a picture of the Judgment Day given by the King of kings: “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me’” (Matt. 25:34-36). According to this image, the Good Shepherd will be judging all individuals of “all the nations” (verse 32) on the Judgment Day based on whether or not they did certain works.

Similarly, we are told in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (see also Rev. 20:11-15). It is certain that parts of the New Testament emphasize good works. However, we must remember that the sum of God’s word is true, and not just some of it (Psa. 119:160).

When one encounters the magnificent passage of Ephesians 2:8-9, he or she quickly discovers the love of God:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”
Ephesians 2:8-9

The apostle Paul, writing to the saved in Ephesus, claims that salvation is by grace and through faith.

GRACE

Salvation is by grace. Grace has been commonly defined as “unmerited

favor” and “blessings bestowed when wrath is owed.” Professionally, it has been defined as, “merciful kindness” and “kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved.” When one has come in contact with grace, he or she has received something that was not earned. We know that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). All humans that are mature enough to make their own decisions in the past have sinned (past tense) and fall short (present tense) of God’s glory. However, in the next verse, we read that the people of God are “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

It is true that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a), but it is equally true that “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23b). And we notice again, that salvation is “not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” We now understand that salvation and grace are perfectly linked together in that they are both called the gift of God. Generally, a gift is given for free, motivated by love, and not because the recipient worked to earn it. There is no wonder why grace is called unmerited (“underserved”) favor!

Grace is obviously the beginning point of salvation. The snapshot of God’s grace is this: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). It is a horrifying truth that we have all given Jesus Christ a reason to die! In this, the saying is true: Grace can be understood through the acronym, “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.”

Christ’s death was a result of two things: our sin (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 9:22) and God’s love for us (John 3:16, 1 John 4:9). This love is not because of who we are, but it is because of who God is! “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

FAITH

Grace is attained through faith. The word “faith” is found more than 240 times in the New Testament. Surely, God considers it an important word. We do not have to go to Webster or some Greek lexicon to define faith, because God defines it for us: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). If a person has faith, he or

she stands on that for which he or she hopes.

A Christian's hope, of course, is not on earth; it is laid up in heaven (Col. 1:5). The man or woman of God should constantly be reminded that this world is not our home. If a person has been "born again...of the water and Spirit," he or she is a part of the kingdom of God (John 3:3-6); therefore, his or her "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). When that is the case, we can say with the apostle Paul, "we walk by faith, and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7), because "the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

On the other hand, what if a person does not have faith? "And 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 seek Him." (Heb. 11:6). This verse gives us a secondary definition of faith: belief in the existence and action of God. This belief is what we must have in order to please our Creator.

WHERE WORKS AND OBEDIENCE COME IN

Grace is God's response to our sin. Faith is the medium through which a soul attains salvation by grace. Good works is the proper response to God's grace. Jesus describes the conversion process as being "born again" (John 3:3-6). We later read that when someone is baptized into Christ, he or she is raised to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4), because "he [or she] is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The process of salvation has been compared to a three-legged stool. The legs are grace, faith, and obedience. Remove one, and it will not stand. We will now examine the "grace through faith" passage one more time, but we will include the next verse in the reading, which is often neglected:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 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.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Considering verse 10 with the reading, we also learn that when we come in contact with God's saving grace, we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works." One is not "created in Christ" until he or she is "baptized into Christ" (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27). Once a person obeys God and is "born of

water and the Spirit," then he or she is expected to work for God until death, for "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:26). Do not forget, however, that our working faith will not avail unless it is a "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

In the New Testament book of Hebrews, we have what some have called, "The Hall of Faith" (chapter 11). In this chapter, we find more than fifteen individuals commended by their faith. We are told over and over, "By faith..." the man or woman of God did something that pleased God.

These individuals acted out of faith, standing on the promises of God, which include "things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Human experience can never prove to us that we are saved by grace; however, it is a promise of God, and with faith, we believe it, because God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). We obey Jesus Christ because we love Him (John 14:15, 21). Otherwise, Jesus would be saying to us, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Jesus says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). God truly offers salvation to all of us freely. However, He does not force it on a single soul.

He puts conditions on salvation. Your soul is the most important possession you have (Mark 8:26-27). Do not neglect it! We are asked the rhetorical question, "[H]ow shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...?" (Heb. 2:3-4). Will you pay attention to your soul and salvation today by stepping out in faith to access the grace of God? Then, and only then, can you say with the hymn writer, "Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!"