

Why We Are Saved By Grace Alone, Not by Grace AND Works

Acts 15:6-12, Trinity Sunday XVII
October 8, 2006

Beloved of the Lord..... We often have a hard time understanding grace. Though each believer knows salvation is a free gift from God, by grace alone, our flesh always has a way of asking the question, why me? Why is it that we are saved from our sins and not others, even though Christ died for all. Inevitably we ask the question, why do I believe while others do not? What makes me different from other people? After this it is only natural to question the teaching that we are saved by grace alone, without good works or deeds. After all, we say, if I am saved and so many are not, there must be something about me that makes me different from others.

In the end, this is why there are so many Christian denominations in the world today. People just cannot believe they are saved by grace alone, without good works. And so, many churches teach that man is not saved by grace alone, but by grace AND good works. Therefore, they say, if you want to be saved from your sins you must not only believe but also do good works. The problem with this is that the grace of God and the works of man are complete opposites. They are as far apart from each other as heaven from earth. You can believe that you are saved by grace alone or by works, but never both. For if we believe that we are saved by grace alone, it is the same as believing we are not saved by good works. Likewise, if we believe we are saved by good works, then we do not believe we are saved by God's grace alone. Romans 11:6 says that if we are saved by grace, "then is it no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace." God's grace is a love which man does not deserve. This special undeserving love which God gives us, grace, was revealed to man by way of God's Son on the cross. God now says to us, "I have already forgiven you of all sins, not because you deserve it, but because My Son has paid for all of your sins on the cross." God does not say to us, "I will forgive you IF you do many good works in your life." This then is what separates the believer and the unbeliever, namely the cross of Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 1:18 says, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." The preaching of the cross, the teaching that man is saved by grace alone is foolish to the unbeliever. It does not make sense to him. The unbeliever does not receive God's grace by faith. But to the believer, the preaching that we are saved by grace alone is incredibly good and joyous news which delivers us from the fires of hell, giving us heaven. Though God's grace came at great cost to God's own Son, God gave this grace freely to the whole world with no strings attached. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of

yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8, 9

As we listen to and hear God's Word today, let us meditate upon, and truly contemplate just how it is that man is saved from his sin. May God the Holy Spirit convince your heart of God's Gospel truth, namely that we are saved by grace alone, not by grace AND works.

I. The free grace of God cannot be improved upon by any "good works" which man does. Our lesson starts out with turmoil among the Christians of Antioch. These Christians had enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity, but false teachers entered in. They said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." The believing Jews wanted the believing Gentiles to be circumcised if they were to be saved. This teaching caused "no small dissension" in the Antioch congregation.

From this we learn that wherever the Gospel is being preached, the devil, world, and our own flesh will work to undermine this Gospel peace. In our own congregation even now we presently enjoy a wonderful and joyous season of peace and prosperity! God is giving us each day our daily bread. His grace is continually shining down upon us, and there is not a dark cloud in the sky! Oh how we can praise God for that! But in such times of peace we should still be sober and vigilant. I Peter 5:8-9 say "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith." Just as the devil assaulted the Antioch congregation with a false teaching regarding circumcision, so he can assault us. Our treasure then should be God's Word, and the free grace of salvation which is given to us through the blood of the Lamb. Therefore beware the leaven of the Pharisees. If any man, woman, or even our own heart teach us that we are saved not by grace alone, but by grace AND works, do not believe it. Only the free grace of God saves the sinner.

Paul and Barnabas knew this free grace of God well, and they rejoiced in it daily. But they were not able to settle the doctrinal controversy at Antioch. The congregation then as a whole decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the brethren. When they arrived in Jerusalem "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses." Notice that these were Pharisees "which believed." These would be Pharisees similar to Nicodemus, who had come to believe the Gospel. But we see by their teachings they were not completely rid of all self-righteousness. So we should remember today, that all Christians are Pharisees at heart. We are sinners and saints at the same time. Error can arise from our own hearts.

In our lesson today certain Pharisees were being tempted to fall back under the yoke of the law. Though they were insisting that the Gentiles be

circumcised.....God calls them "Pharisees which believed." Truly they were believers, but they were being tempted to add their own good works to the grace of God for salvation! In much the same way today, we too are "Pharisees which believed." God the Holy Spirit, has given each believer the gift of faith by the cleansing power of God's Word and He keeps and preserves us in the true faith daily. But once we have faith in salvation by grace alone, we dare not add our own good works into the mix. God the Father will not tolerate the pure, holy, and righteous blood of His Son, to be mingled with the unclean works of man. The holy shed blood of Jesus Christ has more than enough redemptive power to completely wash and cleanse all sin from all men in all the world! Where sin abounds, God's grace does much more abound! "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanses us from all sin." "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." For this reason we should see the utter foolishness of any man trying to improve upon the redeeming good work of Christ Jesus on the cross. Sinful man whose own hands are daily tainted with sin, cannot improve nor add to the redemptive power of God's own blood! What foolishness! Yet that is exactly what people do today when they believe that it is not God's grace alone that saves them, but it is God's grace plus man's own good works! This is like a man with AIDS donating his blood to a healthy person, somehow believing that his tainted blood will help a healthy person get better! So we should never dare to think that our own good works can improve or add value to the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The good works of man, and the free grace of God are complete opposites. To believe in one, is to cancel out the other. God's free grace is a perfect stranger to the good works of man. They have no common ground. Nor can one tolerate the other. On the cross Jesus said, "It is finished." He did not say, "It is finished, as long as you complete your half of the bargain."

II. God's free grace is given freely to the world, Jews and Gentiles alike. When Paul and Barnabas reached Jerusalem, the brethren consulted together regarding whether or not the Gentiles ought to be circumcised. Finally after much disputing Peter rose up and calmly said, "Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe." Likewise, God "Put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" From these word of Peter, we learn that God has put no difference between Jews and Gentiles. Both races, indeed all the races of men are descendants of Adam and Eve, born in sin. Thanks be to God the second Adam, God's own Son came to redeem the whole world of sin! And

just as the Law of God condemns all equally to eternal death, so the Gospel absolves and declares all redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. We are to believe and rejoice in this wonderful message of salvation by grace alone, without the deeds of the law. The Bible says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Rom. 10:9 Peter said the same thing to the brethren at Jerusalem. He said, "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." God's grace is freely give to all men. We need only believe this truth. Jesus said, "Fear not, only believe." The only way to lose out on this wonderful salvation, is to live in unbelief.

Beloved of the Lord, God's grace, though it came with great cost to Christ Jesus, such grace is freely given to man with no strings attached. That's just what the Gospel is. The Gospel is the Gospel! The Gospel does not threaten us and say, "Believe me or else." The Gospel does not promise us and say "You are saved, you are saved....but here is a whole list which I require from you!" The Gospel does not say, "I died only for the sins of those who believe in Me. " Nor does the Gospel say, "I will save only those which have a spark of goodness in them, or those whose heart is in the right place, or those who have good intentions." No, the Gospel does not say any of this! Rather the Gospel says, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanses us from ALL sin." The Gospel says, "God so loved the WORLD, that He GAVE His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Gospel says, "Christ died for all." He even died for those who ultimately perish in hell! Jesus Christ on the cross died for all His enemies, so that all His enemies could be saved! The Bible says, "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Rom. 5 And so, "We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."

Since all of this is true concerning the Gospel....since the Bible over and over again teaches that salvation is a "gift of God, not of works", let us believe, trust, and rejoice in it daily. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Rom. 1:16 The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's powerful salvation, given to you freely by grace alone and not by works. Therefore receive God's grace by faith, for it is yours. God has promised it to you. "Fear not, only believe". Amen.