**The Relationship Between Grace, Faith & Works**

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Salvation is one of the most fundamental topics that Christians can discuss. Understanding what the scriptures say about salvation will affect how we approach other parts of scripture and ultimately will determine whether or not we inherit eternal life with God in Heaven. As we look into the Bible to examine this topic, we need to be careful that we take an “all of scripture” approach lest we be guilty of either over-emphasizing or under-emphasizing an aspect of salvation and teach what is false. What, then, do the scriptures teach about salvation?

To begin with, the scriptures teach that we are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Grace in this passage is the unmerited favor of God. We often associate grace solely with the forgiveness of sins, but God's grace encompasses much more than this. God’s grace includes His desire to save mankind by sending Jesus to die for us in the first place. God's grace doesn't end with our conversion to Christ. We are to continually seek God's grace when we sin (1 Jn. 1:9), and grow in God's grace as we grow in Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). If God's grace simply means the forgiveness of sins, then Peter's teaching would be to sin more so we could receive more grace. This would contradict Paul's teaching (Rom. 6:1). Peter is actually teaching that we need to grow in the favor of God, not by earning it, but by growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This knowledge will lead us closer to God and further away from the Devil. Grace is not simply favor. It is *unmerited* favor. God did not have to bestow His grace upon us: He chose to do so of His own free will. This is why salvation by grace is called “the gift of God … not of works lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:9). Nothing I do in this life enables me to tell God that I deserve grace. This does not mean that God extends His grace without placing any expectations on my part, for Paul said that we are saved by grace *through faith* (Eph. 2:8). One’s salvation by God’s grace must be coupled with one’s faith. Thus salvation is not only by God’s grace; one’s faith is required. However, that God is willing to declare us righteous by faith is indeed gracious (Rom. 4:5).

The Calvinist may respond by claiming that this faith is not our own but is faith that God gives us when He opens our hearts. But the scriptures teach that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The scriptures never teach that God gives us saving faith against our will. Mankind must hear the word of God and, upon hearing, must respond with faith. If such is true in Romans, then it is also true in Ephesians. The saving faith of Ephesians 2:8 is not faith supplied to us by God but is faith that is produced in us as a response to hearing the word of God. Faith is the response God requires of any who would be saved by His grace.

What type of faith does God require? Hebrews 11 says that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” and that “without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (vss. 1,6).

Christians are ridiculed by some for believing in things we have not seen and trusting in a God who doesn't bodily appear among us. Others may see faith as irrational, not realizing that they also believe in things they have not seen and place their trust in people they have never met. Every time you fly, you place your faith in a pilot whom you do not know and may never see, to be able to safely fly an aircraft to your destination. Why do you do this? Because you trust that the pilot has been suitably trained to fly the aircraft according to the regulations set out by the government. It is when you lose your faith in this that you begin to choose not to fly.

God hasn't left us without evidence of His existence (Ps. 19:1). He dwelt among us in bodily form in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14). Furthermore, God made promises about blessing the world, and He fulfilled those promises through Jesus. Eyewitnesses reported what they saw concerning this—including Jesus' death, burial and resurrection—and it is their trustworthy testimony inspired by the Holy Spirit Himself in which we place our faith (Jn. 20:30-31, 1 Cor. 15:1-8, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Our faith is not founded on sinking sand or based on pie in the sky. Our faith is grounded in evidence. This evidence allows us to believe in God and trust that when God says something, He is able to accomplish it. God has promised to raise up the faithful on the last day and grant them eternal life (1 Thess. 4:13-18). I can have faith (or trust) in God's power to do this based on who God is and what God has done in the past, including raising Jesus from the dead. However, a saving faith is much more than giving mental assent to an established set of facts. Saving faith actually requires us to obey God.

This is where works come in. Ephesians 2:9 says that grace is received apart from works. The works spoken of here are works of merit—works that cause us to boast in our own actions. In contrast, God has designed good works in which we should walk, works that complete our faith but earn us nothing (Eph. 2:10). These works are the very works that James speaks of in James 2:14-26. When reading this passage, one may come away thinking that James is comparing having faith with a lack of faith. Instead, James is comparing *living* faith with *dead* faith. The demons have dead faith because, though they believe in God, they do not obey. However, note that what they have is still identified as faith (Jas. 2:19). James calls us to have living faith by believing in God and obeying what God calls us to do. Repenting of our sins earns us nothing; but faithful people will repent because God has told us to do it. Baptism in water for the remission of sins earns us nothing, but this is what a faithful person will do because God says to do it. The same could be said of modesty, worship, godly living, etc. We do not perform works merely to show our faith; we perform works to *complete* our faith because we know that faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:22,26). We are still unprofitable servants, doing only what is our duty to do (Lk. 17:10). This view of faith and works does not lead us to live in constant fear of Hell if we have a proper understanding of salvation and forgiveness. When Christians sin, their sins are forgiven when they approach God in prayer confessing their sins (1 Jn. 1:9). God is faithful and just, and He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness when we so confess. Thus, I am not saved because I am so good but because God is so good. And since God is faithful to provide forgiveness when I repent, I can walk confidently by faith as long as my faith is grounded solidly upon God's word and not on man's opinions (1 Jn. 5:13).

Let's never be found overemphasizing faith and works to the neglect of God’s grace. However, let's also never deemphasize our own faith and works as being necessary to enjoy God’s grace. According to God, we are saved by grace, faith, and works—all three. Anything less will not lead us to Heaven.