

So Great Salvation

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Chapter Fifteen

BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH, OR, HOW IS MAN SAVED?

There is a very important question that comes to every person. It is this. How is it possible for any individual to enter into all things that are included in salvation? What must be done, if anything, to be saved? The Bible, when properly interpreted, gives a simple and definite answer.

Salvation is by grace on the part of GOD and received through faith on the part of man. "**For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: It is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast**" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

By Grace

Grace is one of the greatest words in the Bible. It speaks not of what man does for GOD but what GOD does for man. It may be said to be GOD's abounding provision through the operation of His infinite, or unlimited, love on behalf of one who will believe in Him. It is the kindness and love of GOD toward man, whereby all that the Christian is and all that he has is provided through JESUS CHRIST. "**He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?**" (Romans 8:22).

GOD is love and grace is that love in action.

Grace is always unmerited. In fact man's demerit is that which makes grace possible. Had man not sinned then JESUS CHRIST could not by the grace of

GOD "**have tasted death for every man**" (Hebrews 2:9).

The operation of grace is not hindered by sin, nor is it limited thereby. "**But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound**" (Romans 5:20). "**God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**" (Romans 5:8). Some one has said, "*Grace works not by what it finds, but by what it brings.*"

All that is included in salvation is by grace. It is not only that which GOD does to remove man's sin and guilt and restore that which was lost by the failure and sin of man. It includes all that GOD does in conforming redeemed man into the likeness of His Own SON and placing him in a state of eternal glory.

Salvation in its fullest sense, including the past, present and future work of GOD for the believer, is one continuous series of acts of grace. "**The Word (the SON of GOD) was made flesh and dwelt among us, . . . full of grace and truth. And of His fulness (of grace) have all we (who believe) received, and grace for grace**" (John 1:14, 16).

It was by the grace of GOD CHRIST tasted death for all men (Hebrews 2:9). Sins are forgiven according to the riches of GOD's grace (Ephesians 1:7). Sinners are justified freely by His grace (Romans 3:24) and grace reigns unto eternal life (Romans 5:21). Paul said, ". . . **by the grace of God I am what I am**" (I Corinthians 15:10).

There is grace by which believers may serve GOD acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28). Liberal giving of material things out of deep poverty and under great trial of affliction, but with abundance of joy is said to be a grace bestowed on the churches of Macedonia (II Corinthians 8:1-4). And GOD is able to make all grace abound toward believers; so that they will always have sufficiency in all things and may abound in every good work (II Corinthians 9:8). There is grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). The heart becomes established with grace (Hebrews 13:9) and GOD has given an everlasting consolation and good hope through grace (II Thessalonians 2:16).

In addition to all this there is the promise of grace that is to be brought to believers at the revelation of JESUS CHRIST (I Peter 1:13). Surely all this is grace upon grace by Him who was full of grace and truth. Salvation is all by grace.

Not of Yourselves

Man can contribute nothing to his own salvation because it is "**not of yourselves.**" It is well that it is so for man is fallible and finite and all that he does of himself is destined sooner or later to failure. Therefore if he did add anything to accomplish his own salvation his salvation would be imperfect and incomplete. But salvation is entirely of GOD and that which He does is perfect and shall not fail. ". . . **it is . . . by grace;** (and therefore of God) **to the end the promise might be sure**" (Romans 4:16).

When one considers the infiniteness of salvation, how could it be possible for fallen, sinful and undone man to contribute anything that might in the least be recognized by GOD as being given as payment for that which He freely gives or as contributing to that which He does?

Neither is it a matter of surrendering the life or the heart to GOD or yielding the life to Him. That is a part of sanctification and not in any way a condition for receiving eternal life. If it were necessary, salvation would be by works. There is, however, a surrender that must be made in order to be saved. It is necessary to surrender or to yield any and all dependence upon one's own righteousness as a means toward being saved.

As the essence of sin is man's desire to depend upon self and be independent of GOD, every effort of man to do something himself instead of completely depending upon GOD becomes just one more sin committed by him and keeps him from GOD.

The hardest lesson for man to learn seems to be that he can do nothing whatsoever to aid GOD in His saving work.

Not of Works

Salvation is also said to be "**not of works.**" This is emphasized elsewhere in GOD's Word. "**Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us**" (Titus 3:5). And again "**who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace**" (II Timothy 1:9).

These passages most definitely exclude, as a means to salvation, all that can be called human works, such as obedience to the Ten Commandments, fulfilling the golden rule, joining a church or religious organization and participating in religious organization and participating in religious and social work. All religious exercises such as prayers, fasting, penance and self-denials, baptism and any other strivings on the part of man to earn or merit salvation are ruled out. Not that many of these things do not have a value in the sight of GOD, but they contribute nothing whatsoever toward gaining

salvation and man's entrance into a state of eternal bliss with GOD.

It is not even a matter of putting away sin. That is a matter for the saved, or justified, person to do.

Salvation cannot be of works for then it could not be by grace. **"And if grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work"** (Romans 11:6). **"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt"** (Romans 4:4).

Lest Any Man Should Boast

Salvation is not of works lest any man should boast. This is so that **"no flesh shall glory in the presence of God"** (I Corinthians 1:29). How this puts to naught all the stories about men coming up to the pearly gates and being questioned by St. Peter as to the good that they have done to gain admittance! That is one place where man shall not glory in his own achievements.

The Gift of GOD

Salvation is the gift of GOD. It must be a gift to be by grace. Here again merit on the part of man is excluded, for that which is given on condition of merit or goodness is not a gift but a reward that GOD gives for good conduct. This again teaches that people do not enter heaven because of the good that they have done.

Through Faith

Inasmuch as salvation is by grace and is a free gift from GOD and is in no way of man nor because of any good or meritorious thing that man can do, it is evident that man's part in salvation is merely to depend upon or trust GOD to perform, and to accept that which GOD freely gives. That is exactly what the words **"through faith"** mean.

Faith is counting GOD sufficient to meet every need and able to do even that which seems utterly impossible. Abraham is called the **"father of all them that believe"** (Romans 4:11). Of him it is said, when GOD promised a son, though contrary to all natural conditions; **"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith . . . being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform"** (Romans 4:20-21). Abraham did not make the mistake of putting circumstances between GOD and himself but rather depended upon GOD to

overcome that which to him seemed utterly impossible. This is the meaning of faith. From this it is evident that faith is opposed to human reason, for the latter considers circumstances and man's own judgments instead of depending upon the workings of an omnipotent and infinite GOD and receiving His revelations as found in the Bible.

It is also evident that faith is not work. In fact it is ceasing to work, for one who counts upon GOD to do that which He has promised ceases to depend upon himself to do that selfsame thing: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:9-10). It is an acknowledgment of one's own inability to work. This is always an element of faith.

There is no merit in faith. **"It is of faith that it might be by grace"** (Romans 4:16). If there were the slightest merit in faith, it could not be a channel through which grace could work. It would be a counter agent to grace which, as has been seen, by its very nature excludes merit on the part of man. Faith does not only exclude the thought of merit, it actually includes the idea of helplessness and hopelessness. In faith one depends upon another to do that which one is unable to do for oneself. A child in the family is ill and near death. The family physician is called. In so doing the parents confess their own inability to deal with the illness and express their confidence in the doctor. There is no merit in calling the doctor. Their faith in the doctor merely gives him the opportunity to work.

To believe in GOD through JESUS CHRIST is to commit oneself to Him. In John 2:24 it is said that JESUS did not commit Himself to the Jews because He knew all men. The word here translated "commit" is translated "believeth" in John 3:16 where it is said that **"whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."** Thus we see that believing is committing oneself unto Him so that they should not perish, but have eternal life.

It might be well to emphasize the fact that saving faith is not in a dogma or religious system but is in a Person. It is in that Person fulfilling His promise. JESUS said, ". . . **He that heareth my word and believeth on him (GOD the FATHER) that sent me, hath everlasting life"** (John 5:24). Faith is also in the SON of GOD. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16). It is also in the name of the SON of GOD. **"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name"** (John 1:12). **"His name"** stands for all that He is and all that He did to

redeem man from the penalty of sin. To believe on CHRIST and in His name is to receive Him as the One sent from GOD, Who came to save sinners and to give eternal life.

Faith then is not to believe things about JESUS, that He was a great teacher or a good man nor even that He came to be the SAVIOUR of the world. There must be a personal dependence upon Him to save -- a committal of oneself to Him. He came to save that which was lost -- that which was beyond all human help.

Again, faith is not a mere mental assent to the above facts concerning Him and His work. It is a heart relationship to Him. "**For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness**" (Romans 10:10). Any real dependence upon GOD must come from the heart.

JESUS gave a clear illustration of what faith in Him means. He said to Nicodemus; "**As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life**" (John 3:14-15). The Israelite in the wilderness (See Numbers 21:5-9) showed his faith by looking upon the serpent of brass that hung on the pole. In this one act of faith was expressed a confession of sin and utter helplessness and an acknowledgment that GOD's provision was his only hope. He did not understand the significance of the serpent, nor why it was made of brass. ***He did not analyze his faith to see if it was strong enough or of the right kind. He did not question the intensity of his look. He surely claimed no merit for looking. There were just two things in his mind: his own absolute hopelessness and the sufficiency of GOD's provision, the objects of his faith.*** And this is all that there is to that faith through which the lost are saved. There is no power in faith that contributes to salvation. The saving power comes from GOD.

One more illustration of faith might be helpful. A traveler was taking his first trip across the Atlantic. During the first night out he was awakened from his sleep and immediately realized that he was far out at sea and the only thing between himself and death by drowning was the ship. It was a helpless feeling. The noon before he had committed himself to that ship because he had confidence in it. In that dark hour of the night he reassured himself of the trustworthiness of it and went back to sleep. So a sinner may depend upon JESUS CHRIST and commit himself to Him as the means of being brought to GOD, and can rest in full assurance of His trustworthiness.

Because faith is dependence upon GOD, it is clear that GOD's condition upon man to be saved is a return to the state of perfect dependence upon GOD

which Adam had before he sinned. But in one sense it is more than that. Adam's perfect dependence upon GOD was as the creature to his CREATOR and SUSTAINER. In salvation, in addition to this, it is full dependence upon GOD's provision in JESUS CHRIST to take away sin and the consequences thereof and to give all things with Him.

Repentance and Confession

There are two elements of saving faith which need to be specially mentioned. They are repentance and confession. There are some who seem to think that these are not necessary for salvation. Others emphasize their importance to such an extent that they become conditions in addition to faith. Both of these positions are wrong. It is impossible to believe on JESUS CHRIST as one's personal SAVIOUR without repenting of sin and confessing that one is a sinner.

For a sinner to repent of sin is for him to change his mind concerning sin and there can be no dependence upon GOD to save without this change of mind. As long as one sees nothing wrong in sin but finds pleasure therein and is perfectly satisfied to remain independent of GOD and His SON JESUS CHRIST one will have no desire to be saved. As a part of dependence upon GOD for salvation one will think of sin as the terrible thing that it really is. It will be seen as disobedience to GOD, as contrary to His holiness and as enmity against Him and most of all as that which separates from Him. A real right about face regarding sin takes place. If there be no such experience one may well question the reality of the faith in the SAVIOUR.

To insist upon a repentance that in any sense includes the idea of remorse or a demand for a change of conduct either toward GOD or man, as the works of repentance preached to the Jewish nation by John the Baptist (Luke 3:7-14) or as in penance, is to add an element of works or human merit to faith. This necessarily makes faith void because it is impossible to depend completely upon GOD as long as one tries to contribute something, however little, oneself.

So also in the matter of confession. It is impossible to accept, or believe on JESUS CHRIST as the SAVIOUR from the penalty of sin without confessing that one is a sinner and utterly unable to do anything to remedy the condition.

One who thinks himself righteous needs no savior, in fact self-righteousness is the greatest hindrance to being saved. The Pharisees of Paul's time could not become saved because they were self-righteous (Romans 10:1-3). "**Jesus came into the world to save sinners**" (I Timothy 1:15). It was for

sinner that CHRIST died (Romans 5:8). Only by accepting salvation as a sinner can a person be saved.

To confess oneself as a sinner is not the same as to confess one's sins. It is far more fundamental and self-abasing. It is possible to confess many sins and still claim a great deal of human merit. To confess to GOD that one is a sinner is to exclude all human merit. Furthermore it is impossible for anyone to confess all of one's sins. Many have been forgotten and others may not even have been recognized as such. To confess part of one's sins and not all would be of no avail because all sin must be forgiven or order to be saved.

There is a place for confession of individual acts of sin, but that is for the believer who has committed sin and who seeks forgiveness **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** (I John 1:9).

Any emphasis upon repentance or confession that gives to these the nature of being meritorious is in addition to faith and must be excluded for then they become works, and works, as was shown, have no part in salvation.

It has already been said, but can stand repetition, that the great difference between Christianity and all the religions of the world is that GOD offers salvation as a free gift of His infinite love to all who will but receive it from Him by merely acknowledging their need thereof and accepting, or claiming it; whereas every religion apart from Christianity demands some work on the part of man to earn favor with GOD. There is much in the world that is called Christianity which demands merit on man's part. This is not Christianity, and in so far as human merit is demanded, it denies GOD's offer of salvation by grace through faith.

GOD's Word says that salvation is of grace (GOD's unmerited favor), that it is received through faith (dependence upon GOD), that it is not of oneself, that it is the gift of GOD and that it is not of works, in order to exclude boasting because of human merit. Therefore, man certainly can do nothing but humbly receive it from GOD. All effort on the part of man to earn salvation by that which is in the least meritorious is dishonoring to GOD.

~ end of chapter 15 ~
