

Denominational Doctrines: Changing the Need to Obey

By Keith Greer

One of the most abused subjects taught on in the denominational world is the role God's grace plays in our salvation. The majority of our friends in the religious world would have us believe that our salvation depends entirely on God's grace. In other words, after one accepts Christ -- salvation is a done deal. Those who teach this false theory hate three words -- do, work, and obey. "Anything one MUST do to obtain salvation negates God's grace. A person can do nothing to merit or earn salvation." This is the main argument made, and on the surface, it sounds very believable. This writer believes and teaches that man can do nothing to earn or merit eternal salvation. Why do I believe this? "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" {Luke 17:10} All we have done is what God expects us to do! I want to show from the scriptures that there is no merit in the one-sided (grace-only) view of salvation.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" {Matthew 7:21-23} Notice please that our Lord said only those who "do the will of My Father" shall enter the kingdom. Not doing anything is lawlessness (iniquity). Luke put it a little differently: "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" {Luke 6:46} This sounds to me like work.

"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." {1 John 2:3-6} Here, the apostle John shows a direct comparison between the one who shows proper love for God -- by keeping His commandments -- and the one who merely says he loves Him but does not keep His commandments. John labels him a liar. How could it be clearer? This apostle made the same affirmation in John 14:15 and 15:14.

"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." {Hebrews 5:9} Obedience to God is a must! From the beginning, as with Adam and Eve in the garden, God has given men things to do. What did He expect from them? Obedience -- He told them not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When He gave Noah instructions for building the ark, what did He expect Noah to do? He expected him to build it according to His blueprint, and Noah did (Genesis 6:22). When He instructed Moses to build the tabernacle, what did He expect Moses to do? "Who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make

the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" {Hebrews 8:5} Obedience does not earn our salvation; it shows God we love Him.

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." {James 1:22-25} Do you see where the inspired writer places the emphasis? Merely going through the motions is not good enough. Not only must we hear what God's word tells us, but we must also put what it says into practice in our lives. Who does this passage say God will bless? The one who works and obeys! Many want to question the validity of this book in the sacred canon, and I understand why -- they understand what it teaches! It belongs, and the words of James ring true to those who understand that faith alone can never save anyone. The key is God's grace, plus our obedience.

"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." {James 2:24-26} Does this mean our works save us? Definitely not! By following His commands, we show God, and the world, that we love Him. "But someone will say, You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." {James 2:18} One is truly perverting the text to say that God's grace saves us, regardless what we do or do not do. When Israel took Jericho, would Rahab the harlot have been saved, had she not followed the spies' instructions?

"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." {Revelation 22:14} The apostle John's vision on the isle of Patmos, shows a direct link between obeying the commandments and gaining entrance into the heavenly city. How do we explain these passages if our work has no meaning? Why did God leave us a book filled with His commandments if He did not expect us to follow them?

According to the scriptures, some works are necessary. "Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.'" {Acts 10:34,35} Only those who do the works of righteousness, those things He commanded, will be accepted. Does this mean these works are necessary?

"Then they said to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'" {John 6:28,29} What do our grace-only friends do with this passage? Jesus clearly said that faith is work! If works cannot save us, then we do not need faith. If faith is required, then work is required. Even if this is only one work, it exposes the theory as false. It cannot be both ways.

"So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'" {Acts 9:6} Do you see the implication of these instructions the Lord gave Saul, who later became the great apostle Paul, for his conversion. Saul asked what he needed to do. Our Lord told him to go into the city and he would be told what he must do. We know, from reading the other account in Acts 22, that he did some things. Why did he do them?

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." {Philippians 2:12} Why did Paul give this instruction to the church in Philippi? How can one "work out his salvation" if work is unnecessary? If the grace-only doctrine were true, this passage would be a contradiction of what that doctrine teaches.

Some works are excluded. Works of the Mosaical Law cannot save (Galatians 2:16). Works of self-righteousness and boasting cannot save (Matthew 5:20). Men who believe that, by obeying, they merit or earn salvation are also incorrect (Ephesians 2:8,9). Men may not realize it, but when they come up with their own plans for salvation -- faith only, grace only, etc.-- they are attempting to work their way into heaven. In the end, they themselves are guilty of the very thing they teach against! Sadly, those who practice error always end up tripping over their own misunderstanding. Please read Jeremiah 10:23, Proverbs 14:12, Judges 21:25.

Man can never do enough work to merit or earn his salvation. But that doesn't mean that doing and obeying are not part of what God requires of those who would be saved. The promise of salvation is God's greatest gift. And, as the one who gives the gift, He has the right to require that we meet certain conditions to receive it. Our working and obedience do not merit our salvation; they show God our love, desire, and willingness to obey Him. ***