

SALVATION BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH (1)

BY KEITH GREER

In today's religious world, those who are seeking to teach others that saving faith must be coupled with respect for God's authority, and obedience to His gospel often hear, *"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} Who among us does not believe this passage? It's an excellent passage. Yet, when people misuse it to destroy the meaning and teaching of other passages, they pervert God's truth. The faith-only folks shout loud and long that we are saved by faith—and only faith. Could it be possible that mankind has no need to put forth any effort to attain salvation? Is the only thing we need to do is have faith in God? Let's examine this statement in light of God's truth and see if that's what it teaches.

What works do not save? Clearly, Paul taught the church at Ephesus that works could not save them. We need to understand which types of work were being considered in this text.

Works based on our own merit cannot save us. A person cannot claim the right to salvation, based on works he's done to earn that salvation. *"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.'"* {Romans 3:10-12} All of us have sinned and, therefore, have marks against our records {Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8}. Sin's condemnation rests on every one. Obedient works are not works of merit. "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} The works of one who has obedient faith does not merit (or earn) that person's salvation. He's only done what God has commanded him to do—nothing more.

Works of the Law? Some folks believe that just keeping the Ten Commandments will save them; this is also false. *"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."* {Romans 3:20} Unfortunately, some try to use this passage to show that Christ does not require adherence to law. Consider the context—Paul was speaking to Jews who expected to be saved by keeping the Old Law given by Moses. But that law was no longer in effect when Paul was speaking—or now. *"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."* {Galatians 2:16}

What people often forget is that Moses' law was for the nation of Israel and that it was a temporary law. How do we know? *"But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."* {Galatians 3:23-25} All during Bible history, every step taken along its path is leading and pointing us to Christ. Why? His death was necessary to free men from their bondage to sin and give them a true remedy for our sin problem. Moses' Law was a national law—the law of Christ is a universal law for all men.

Works of obedience save. *"Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'" {John 6:29}* See, even faith is considered a WORK! The Bible tells us that those who obey Him will be saved. People who make the argument that "work of any kind negate God's grace," fail to understand the importance of our obedience in God's plan of salvation. *"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."* {Hebrews 5:9} Obedience is just one way we express our love for God, His grace, mercy, longsuffering, and willingness to give sinful men salvation! We cannot earn or merit salvation; and God is not obligated to save us. He created us, and He loves us, so He initiated a plan whereby we can be saved. So Paul was right; there are works that cannot save us. However, Paul was not ignoring God's call for us to be obedient to His will—this, He's demanded of every person since time began. Why did God give commands, precepts, ordinances, and laws to His people? What did He expect the people to do with them? History tells us when they obeyed they were pleasing to Him and when they disobeyed were rejected. ***