

“Work Out Your Own Salvation” Philippians 2:12

I thought that salvation was a free gift. Aren't we saved by grace, alone? Grace is defined as unmerited favor. What about works and the keeping of God's law? Paul does say, “for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” I know Jesus calls us to come to Him just as we are. Grace must be sufficient? What is grace? Is it just unmerited favor? Does it allow me to continue living in sin because Jesus accepts me that way? When Jesus accepts us just as we are, does he leave us there in the darkness, floundering?

Jesus said “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” John said “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” 3 John 3:4-9. And Paul said “For sin shall not have dominion (power) over you. Romans 6:14.

In the book of Revelation we are told, “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed” Why was the dragon wroth with the woman? Reading on... “which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” He is wroth, or angry, because they are keeping the commandments of God. See Revelation 12:17. “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12. God's people obviously keep His commandments.

When Mary was dragged before Jesus for committing adultery Jesus told her that He did not condemn her. But His very next words were, “go, and sin no more.” See John 8:11. It seems obvious that God expects us to keep His commandments. But doesn't Paul tell us that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified” (saved). If keeping the law won't save us then why do we need to keep it? Because we will be judged by our works and deeds. See Revelation 20:12, 13. Why will we be judged by our works? Because it is by our works (actions) that a person is known. How can we prove that we are followers of Jesus if there is no evidence of it in our lives? You may say that you love someone but if all your actions point in another direction who will be convinced that you love them?

So, even if our actions (works) won't save us, we can't be saved without them since they are the evidence of who we are loyal to. It will be by our actions that we'll be judged, not our profession. See James 2:13-26.

But we still have a big problem because we are powerless to keep God's law and Paul agrees. He says “I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Romans 7:14-21 So, how do we keep a law that we are powerless to keep?

This is where grace comes in. Grace is far more than unmerited favor. Grace is power, unlimited power, to keep us from falling. Paul said in Phillipians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Ellen White puts it this way: "As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command, may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings." --Christ's Object Lessons, p. 333. There is nothing stronger than omnipotence.

But before grace can do its powerful work in me there is something that I must do. To acknowledge that I am powerless to keep God's Law which is holy, just, and good is a daily necessity. Even though I want to keep God's Law, until I come to the place of yielding everything to God, giving Him permission to work in me, to will and to do His good pleasure, I am going to fail. Once I do this, everything changes. Now my works are not mine but the works that God does in and through me. The good works that others will now see me performing are due to God's power working in me. I can take no credit for them since it is not me doing them but God working them out in me.

In conclusion, we can understand what Paul meant when he told us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" and continues with "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." God is doing the work that we are judged by but, we still have a work. Our work is to surrender to God's work in us. He cannot and will not work in us unless we unconditionally surrender to Him. We must fear and tremble lest we are not unconditionally surrendered, because God will not do His work in us unless we are. Our salvation is completely dependent on our choice and willingness to surrender. Our work is the work of surrender and it is, for most, a very hard work. Human nature does not want to surrender to anyone. In the world we live in today, surrender is equated with losing everything. It is seen as foolishness. In God's world, surrender is the means of gaining everything.

We can be "confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Phillipians 1:6. If we give God permission to do whatever it takes to save us and to work His character in our lives, we can be confident that He will do it. It is really giving Him the responsibility for perfecting us and He is more than happy to take that responsibility and work good and perfect works in and through you. This way we will be "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Not because of what we do but because of what God does in and through us.

When you put God's kingdom and His righteousness first and foremost in your life Jesus has promised that He will take care of all your needs and give you all the things that others spend all their valuable time trying to acquire. See Mathew 6.