

children. Abraham waited ten years for the promise of God to be fulfilled. Then He took his eyes off the Lord and turned to his own works. At Sarah's request, he attempted to fulfill God's promise through her maid-servant, Hagar. The venture was a "success." Hagar had a son; but it was not the son of promise. Abraham had produced this son, not God. This story of Abraham is actually a divine formula, a blueprint of salvation (see Galatians 4:22-26).

Abraham's ability to have a son with Hagar demonstrated man's attempt to gain salvation partly on the works of the flesh rather than entirely on the promise of God. Another 15 years passed. Then, at 100 years of age, with his own reproductive ability dead, Abraham's only hope was in God and His promise. With 100 percent of his faith in God and none in himself, the promise was fulfilled and Abraham had a son by Sarah. It was a miracle of God's grace, which Abraham clung to through faith, having absolutely no merit in human works. All Abraham could do now was give glory to God.

"And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, *giving glory to God*, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform" (Romans 4:19-21, NKJV).

It took Abraham 25 years to understand this truth, but it has taken many of us even longer. Some are still searching. Placing some degree of creature merit on our works is the religion of our fallen human nature. There are two important lessons in Abraham's experience that promise deliverance.

First, Abraham's body was dead. There was no way that he could fulfill God's promise by his own works or performance. He had no way, in his flesh, to fulfill even one percent of God's Word. Neither can we. Without God, we can do nothing. Even repentance is a gift from God (see Acts 3:26; 5:31).

"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. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes'" (Romans 3:10-18, NKJV).

Does that describe you? If not, look again with some honest heart-searching. When we come to the conclusion that we are helpless, bankrupt of righteousness, God can do great things for us. But as long as we have some idea that we are all right or at least not as bad as the other guy,

we will not cry out to God for deliverance (see Revelation 3:14-21).

At the same time, and this is point number two, Abraham believed God. He believed the promise of God and finally acted on that promise. He looked for a son, talked of a son, trusted for a son and waited for a son. And when the son finally came, Abraham glorified God. Likewise, we are to look for the Son, talk of the Son, trust for the Son and wait for the Son.

Note this second point with care. By the time Abraham finally received Isaac, the child of promise, there was no room for boasting. There was not even the slightest particle of evidence that could cause Abraham to glory in himself. It was quite clear to him and to any familiar with his story that all the glory belonged to God.

The lesson that Abraham and Sarah learned is one of the essentials of the everlasting gospel message. It is the lesson of believing the promises of God and trusting Him to fulfill all His promises. Just as Abraham was promised a son, so through Abraham's seed is the promise of salvation made to all the nations of the world.

"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ" (Galatians 3:16, NKJV).

Summary

This promise of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the seed, the only way of salvation for the entire world. This issue is vital. The controversy encompasses the *way* of salvation: Is it by Christ alone? Or by something else? Or by Christ *and* something else? Many people imagine that *they* must save themselves by making themselves good. Many others think that Christ is a valuable adjunct, a good Assistant to their efforts. Others are willing to give Him the *first* place, but not the *only* place. They regard themselves as good seconds; it is the Lord *and* they who do the work. But the everlasting gospel shuts off all such assumption and self-assertion. The promise of salvation comes through *the* "offspring," through *the* "seed." Not many, but one. "And to your offspring, which is Christ" (see Galatians 3:16). Christ is the One. Give glory to Him. Amen.

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GOD'S LAST MESSAGE TO THE WORLD 3

The everlasting gospel carried by the messengers of Revelation 14 brings to view one of the most fundamental truths of the Bible. And yet, it is also one of the most misunderstood Bible truths. It is the issue of creature merit. Simply put, we fallen human beings are the *creatures* and *merit* implies some degree of salvation-worthiness earned by our good works. I give you fair warning: this issue has caused division between Christians for centuries. In fact, it was a major issue during the ministry of Christ and the subsequent rise of the Christian church. It is no surprise, therefore, to find at the very heart of the everlasting gospel, a call to give glory to Him and not to ourselves.

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters'" (Revelation 14:6-7).

In our previous studies we have considered the phrases "everlasting gospel" and "Fear God." Now we want to focus our attention on the phrase, "give glory to Him." Let's begin by considering a bedrock text on the subject of salvation.

"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).

The Greek word for *boast* in this text is translated "glory" in other texts. In light of this, verse 9 could be read: "Not of works, lest any man should glory."

The Ephesians 2 presents a corollary to the message of Revelation's everlasting gospel: "give glory to Him." Here we find that no person should glory in any works they do, because they are saved by God's grace, not by *their* works. The fact that we are saved by grace—

Give Glory to God

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Christ's atoning death in our place becomes the motivation for all who would respond by personally accepting this gift.

God's grace, since we have none of our own—should cause us to cease and desist from giving any glory to ourselves. The reasonable conclusion, then, is to give glory to God—all the glory. This can only happen as we understand that we have been saved totally by the grace of God and not by our works. Any religious teaching that gives *any* degree of merit to the creature for salvation diverts that much glory from God. To experience salvation as a gift that cannot be earned by good works *is* to give glory to God. Consider another text on this subject:

“That no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:29-30).

Or in other words: “It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30, NIV)

For all those who accept salvation, Christ becomes their righteousness (justification), their holiness (sanctification), and their redemption (glorification). In Christ is found their title and fitness for heaven. His righteousness is everything, “That, according as it is written, ‘he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 1:31).

This grand truth is the theme of the Bible and it will be the eternal song of the saved of all ages. In the book of Revelation, John was shown a future panorama of the redeemed gathered in an innumerable throng around the throne of God. As they looked to God and to the Lamb, this song of redemption erupted spontaneously from their lips.

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9-10).

Notice, they do not say: “Salvation to our works, our obedience, our self-sacrifice, or to our faith.” The glory or credit for the salvation of every soul lies 100 percent in the grace of God. It is not 50/50 or even 90/10. Salvation is a fact accomplished by Christ and is extended to us as a gift that we may take hold of by faith. Faith, then, becomes the means through which we lay hold of the fact.

A Warning Against “Cheap Grace”

So much for righteousness by works. But now we are faced with an opposite question. “If we are saved by grace, then what does it matter how we live?” Unfortunately, many today have taken up such a response to the gospel. And the Bible warned that it would happen:

“For certain men . . . have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (Jude 4, NIV).

This opposite extreme may seem far from legalism in that it gives no thought to creature merit; yet, it also fails to give glory to God.

If we journey back to the early church, we find that the apostle Paul was falsely accused of promoting this “cheap grace” kind of experience because of his strong emphasis on the goodness of God.

“And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come?’—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say” (Romans 3:8, NKJV).

This slander against Paul did not come from the unbelieving world. It was the accusation of those who would place some degree of merit to human works. The apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, was balanced concerning salvation by grace through faith (see Romans 6:14-15, 9:30-33; Galatians 2:16-18; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Overall, we find that the Bible presents an important balance concerning our salvation by grace alone through faith alone. It clearly teaches that such salvation is always found wholly in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. His righteousness is given as a gift to all through His sacrifice on the cross. This gift is clearly demonstrated by the fact that all mankind have temporal lives. None would be living today if it weren't for the cross of Jesus. Therein lies unmistakable evidence of God's grace extended to the entire human family. Christ's atoning death in our place becomes the motivation for all who would respond by personally accepting this gift.

In other words, the existence that every person now has, whether saint or sinner, cost the life of Jesus Christ. The crucial difference between the lost and the saved is that the one has personally accepted that gift and the other has not. In this way, Jesus “is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Timothy 4:10, NKJV). When we realize that this life is a gift and we personally accept Christ's sacrifice, the gift is internalized and eternalized. Our belief and acceptance of Christ transforms the heart and changes the life. The believer now longs to live for Him who died in his place. The realization of God's love creates new motives in the fallen, selfish heart.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Works are the fruit of salvation, not the means by which salvation is attained. The gospel teaches that we are saved by grace through faith and not of works. This salvation is “unto” good works. In other words, genuine faith produces fruit. Good works are the natural, inevitable result of accepting the gospel. As with the law of gravity—“what goes up, must come down”—so with the law of faith—“what goes in, must come out” (see Romans 3:27, 31). Paul expressed profound thanks for those who accepted this gospel truth—those who did not depend on their own works for salvation, yet who manifested the fruit of the gospel in their lives.

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth” (Colossians 1:3-6, NKJV).

It is not an issue of trying to make our faith produce works. Saving faith *will* produce good works. Our focus, then, is to be sure that we have the right faith, for there is only one true faith (see Ephesians 4:5). It is the faith that springs from a heart-appreciation of Jesus Christ and His undying love for the world. Any other faith is dead. It is little more, if anything more, than the faith of devils (see James 2:19).

“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17).

Again, it is not a matter of making our faith work, of striving to produce that which the gospel promises. Saving faith cannot sit still. It is compelled by love to glorify the grace of God.

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6).

Never forget that our works have no merit to save us. Repeat this truth to yourselves often, for its constant realization in the light of the cross will produce good works (see Titus 3:1-8). Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone. Our good works simply reveal to heaven, the world and the devil that we trust 100 percent in Christ. They testify to the genuineness of the salvation we have accepted. If the works are missing, it is not a matter of striving to produce them as a means to salvation. Rather, it is a matter of finding Jesus and focusing on Him. If we lack the fruit of the gospel, it is because we lack the gospel itself.

As we embrace the wonderful good news of salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ, our natural response will be to bring glory to the God who has given us this unspeakable gift.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Notice that Christ said, “*let* your light shine,” not “*make* your light shine.” When we have genuine faith in Christ, when we see Him as our all-sufficient Savior from sin, our lights *will* shine in whatever we do.

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The Experience of Abraham

In the Old Testament story of Abraham, we find a classic example of just what it means to give glory to God. When Abraham was 75 years old, God promised him and his wife, Sarah, a son. Sarah's initial response was laughter. For the next 25 years the idea did appear to be some kind of a joke. Sarah had been barren all her life. Now she was too old to have