

SALVATION AND WORKS

(EXPLANATION)

The purpose of this Explanation is as follows:

- 1. To understand grace and that we are saved by grace alone. Salvation cannot be earned in any way.*
- 2. To understand that being saved by grace does not mean that the person who accepts Christ can keep on sinning. There is no such thing as a Christian who continues to sin without restraint.*
- 3. To understand that the very fact that we know that we dislike sinning and has a desire to get rid of sin in our lives means that we are new creations - i.e. we are born again of God. Those born again (i.e. born from above) are changed into new people from the inside. We become different in our hearts (i.e. our spirit).*

GRACE AND WORKS

1. We are saved by grace alone. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves or make us worthy to be saved. We are all sinners (Romans 3:23) and the penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We all deserve death no matter how good a life we try to live. God save us not because we are good people. Jesus died for us in spite of our sins - even though we do not deserve to be saved (Romans 5:8). God's love is unconditional and free. It is undeserved. This is grace.

Salvation is by grace alone, i.e. there is nothing that we can do to make God want to save us or deserve to save us. Many people, before they become Christians, hesitate to receive Christ because they feel that they are not good enough, or they want to fix their own problems first. They feel that if they just come to God and receive free salvation that is unreasonable. **Yes! Salvation IS unreasonable.** There is no reason why God should love us and to die for us in order to save us. He did it because we do not deserve it. He did it because He loves us and His love is not conditional upon our actions.

We receive salvation by faith. Is faith then also something that we do, i.e. a kind of work?

Faith is not a work. Faith is saying, "I cannot do it. I cannot save myself. I believe that Jesus has done it all. I believe that Jesus can save me. I believe that he wants to save me. Thank you, Jesus, for dying for me. I receive your grace." Hence believing is receiving salvation – it is an acknowledgement that I cannot do it on my own.

2. Many people become Christians by grace but want to live the Christian life by works. They feel that if they do well, then God will bless them more. If they do badly, then God will bless them less. This is absolutely incorrect. **All blessings we receive from God is because of GRACE.** Grace getting something that we do not deserve – what we did not earn. If God is to treat us according to our deeds (our performance), then we would all be without any blessings at all but deserve only curse instead.
3. What is the place of works in the Christian life, then? Works is a natural part of the life of God inside us as we are born again and receive new life (2 Corinthians 5:17). The works that we do should not be purely man's effort. That is why the Bible says that we as Christians are set free from keeping the law (Romans 6:14). This does not mean that the law of God is useless and do not apply any more. God's law is still the will of God for our lives. However, we could not keep the law by our own effort before and we cannot keep the law by our effort now.

A good illustration is what Jesus said about our works. Jesus used a tree and its fruits to describe these works. A Christian must have appropriate works because he is changed from the inside. If a Christian does not have the works of God, then it shows that he/she is not a child of God. You can tell the tree by the fruit it bears. A Christian tree will bear 'Christ' fruits. You cannot help doing that¹.

However, for a branch to bear fruit, it must abide, remain or stick on to the tree stem (John 15:5). The fruit is the natural result of abiding in the stem. The branch of itself cannot force the fruit out, neither can the Christian by himself/herself force the works out. By staying in close relationship with God, we will naturally bear fruit. By bearing fruit, we show that we really belong to God.

4. James 2:14-26 tells us that faith without works is dead. What he is saying is the same as what Jesus said. True faith must have works to show it. If I say that I believe in a person but would not trust the person for anything at all, then my action shows that my faith in the person is dead faith – it is faith by mouth but not true in the heart. True faith in God must be expressed by our works².

GRACE AND SIN IN THE CHRISTIAN

1. A Christian is not perfect and will fall into sin. When this happen, does it mean that he cease to become a Christian? The answer is obvious. No! Since we did

¹ Matthew 7:16-20 and Luke 6:43-45.

The type of tree will determine the type of fruit it will bear. An orange tree cannot produce apples. An orange tree must produce oranges. In other words, when a person is born again into the family of God and become a child of God, he/she will produce fruit that reflects who he/she is. A child of God will no doubt have actions that will reveal this fact. If a person never has actions that are of the family of God, then we must doubt if the person is a child of God.

² Matthew 7:21-23; 25:31-46

In these verses, Jesus seems to put the condition of entering the Kingdom of Heaven (7:21) or have eternal life (25:46) as doing the will of God. Those who have done the will of God or have served the King will have eternal life. Those who have not will not have eternal life. In other words, these verses seem to suggest that our salvation is dependent on our works but Jesus is saying exactly what James is saying. The fruit will show what sort of tree it really is!

not become a Christian by our works in the first place, therefore, we cannot cease to become a Christian by our works. God's salvation is conditional upon our believing and receiving – not upon our works.

2. However, what is the difference between a Christian sinning and a non-Christian sinning? The difference is like that of a sheep and a pig.

A pig likes mud and dirt and do not like to be clean. Before we come to the Lord, we are like that. We love to sin and feel uncomfortable not sinning. In fact we cannot help but sin. But when we became a Christian, we changed from a pig into a sheep.

A sheep do not like dirt. It likes to be clean. However, every now and then a sheep fall into the mud and get dirty. When this happen, the sheep will want to get clean again. It does not like to remain dirty. So when a Christian falls into sin, he/she would want to confess the sin and get clean and keep clean.

3. This is our assurance of our salvation that when we sin, we feel sorry and want to go to God and confess our faults. This is because we are born again and has a new nature inside us.