

What We Believe (3): Salvation not by Works but by Faith

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)

⁸ For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast.

Titus 3:5 (NASB)

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Introduction

In the past two Sundays, we have covered the following topics: sin, repentance, the wages of sin, and redemption. Here's a recap.

Recap:

- Repentance is the foundation upon which we build our relationship with God. We enter the kingdom of God through repentance for the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus' name. We need to embrace the word "repentance" and the practice thereof, instead of avoiding them.
- What is sin? It is to "miss the mark," which is the glory of God. Anything that violates God's commandments is a sin.
- The Bible also says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- Everyone is destined to die once, and after that comes judgment.
- God made Christ pay the wages (consequences) of our sins and that proves His love toward us. Christ redeemed us from our sins through His own death.

This morning we are going to talk about salvation not by our own good works but by faith in Jesus alone.

Content

Saved not by works but by faith:

We must thank God that He doesn't require any human merits for our salvation. God's mercy and His grace alone get us into Heaven. Everyone is saved through Christ's merits not by their own so that no one may boast to God. It is worth listening to Ephesians

2:8-9 again. ⁸ For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast.

By the way, someone made a distinction between grace and mercy. Mercy is not to receive something that we deserve such as judgment of God. Grace is to receive something that we don't deserve such as salvation.

In salvation, it doesn't matter how many great things we have done. Nor how sinful one can be. Do you remember the song? *What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.* Only by believing and confessing that Jesus is the Son of God we are saved.

Speaking of human merits, let me tell you my experience. I grew up in Korea where Buddhism is very popular. About 1/3 of Koreans claim that they are Buddhists. That means, over 15 million folks are the followers of Buddha. I still remember one of the things they encourage their followers to do, especially if you want to be heard by Buddha. First, you have to show your seriousness by taking a cold bath in the early morning, and start bowing down to his statue up to three thousand times, before you expect him to hear your case. That's human merits.

Here's another story of a man, this time a Christian. His name was Martin Luther, the reformer and the former Catholic priest in the 16th century. He discovered that salvation is not earned by one's own good deeds, in fact, by any human good deeds. Nor can it be bought with money. When he was a young priest, he hoped that his act of penance (e.g., through climbing stairs on his bare knees) would count something in his salvation. Later he realized that that's not what the Bible says about salvation. He also declared that the practice of buying indulgences in those days in the Catholic Church for loved ones in purgatory was not found in the Scriptures. Salvation is, rather, a gift of God attainable only through faith in Jesus Christ not through one's own good works. Indeed, that's what the Bible says: we are saved by God's mercy and grace not by our own deeds.

The same Luther wrote to Melancthon his friend on the same theme: *"Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world"*(Martin Luther, *"Let Your Sins Be Strong," a Letter From Luther to Melancthon*, August 1521, Project Wittenberg, retrieved 1 October 2006).

When it comes down to salvation, I am so glad that God doesn't require us to bring any human merits to the salvation table. Any human merits such as education (e.g., Ph.D.), money (e.g, million dollars), physical condition (e.g, 6 foot tall and up), beauty (e.g., Miss America), age, race, sex, can never buy salvation. No one can fully satisfy any of them,

either. So, God came up with another perfect solution: faith that believes in Jesus and what He has done on the cross. In my humble opinion, that's the perfect and the fairest solution for all to satisfy in salvation. E.g. Once I shared the gospel with a street vendor who accepted Christ on the spot with tears. E.g. 2. Consider the criminal who was crucified at the same time with Christ. With his faith and confession, Jesus had him in the Paradise that day. We are saved not by works but by faith.

Faith without Works Is Dead

Some might argue, what about James, who says that faith without works is dead in his letter to the believers? *"For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead"* (James 2:26). If faith is all we need in our salvation, then, we don't have to be good, right? No, you still ought to be good and will be, not for the sake of salvation but for the sake of the glory of God. The fact that we don't need human works or good deeds for our salvation, or the truth that human merits are not the necessary condition for salvation, never means that we are exempt from living a moral life. God has called us to live a holy life.

Let me repeat what I have said: our own good works don't get us into Heaven; neither are they the necessary condition for salvation. What are they, then? They are the result, not the cause, of our salvation. Good works are a fruit of our salvation. After we are saved through faith, we glorify our heavenly Father through our good deeds. Faith first, then works follow. E.g. Consider 'horse and a cart': they go together, yet, you always put the horse before the cart, not the other way around. The horse here is faith and the cart is works. Faith goes first, and works follow. Anyone who claims to be a believer in Christ will demonstrate good works as a fruit of his/her faith. In other words, God only requires us to bring faith into salvation, yet He expects us to live out our faith through good works to bring glory to His name. It is called "Sanctification." That's another topic for later time.

Created for Good Works

So, do we still have to be good even after we believe? Yes, definitely. We are the children of God, **created for good works** in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). We are the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5:13, 14). We are the children of light. We are to demonstrate how great our God is through our good deeds. *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16, NIV). Works are not the condition for salvation but they are the demonstration of your faith in Jesus (E.g., serving the homeless, helping hurricane relief, Loads of Love, visiting shut-ins, giving a ride for your neighbors).

Conclusion

Freedom from God's judgment cannot be purchased with money or by any human merits. God's grace cannot be earned. Salvation is a gift of God. In Christ, we receive forgiveness through God's mercy. In Christ, we receive salvation through God's grace. No one is justified with his/her own works and merits. We are saved by God's grace through faith alone. Let me read today's verses one more time.

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Amen.