



Are We Saved By Grace or By Faith? by Sellers S. Crain, Jr

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

A completely unnecessary dichotomy has been created between grace and faith. One of the passages which is misinterpreted causing this problem is,

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.
(**Ephesians 2:8-9**)

Evidence of this misinterpretation is found in such statements as,

This verse [8] teaches we are saved by faith alone.; Paul dogmatically says justification is by faith alone.; Scripture teaches that we are justified by faith alone (Romans 5:1-2). **The United Methodist Book of Doctrine** reads, "Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." (1700 Edition, p. 55).

A couple of questions are in order here.

- Where is the Scripture that says we are saved by faith alone?
- Where is the Scripture that says we are justified by faith alone?

Nowhere, except in Martin Luther's translation of the book of **Romans** where he added the word "alone." (**3:28**) Let's look carefully at **Ephesians 2:8-9**. If we read it closely, we will see that it contradicts the doctrine that we are saved by faith alone. It says first that we are "saved by grace" (see also **v.5**). It then says, we are saved "through, or by faith." Grace is one thing, and faith is an entirely different thing. **Grace is God's part, and faith is our part in this equation.** God is the dispenser of grace, and all other grace flows from Him. Grace is all of God and none of me. When I was a young man, I once heard a preacher describe grace in this way: "You go to the top of the highest mountain you can find, and you reach as high as you can, and God reaches down to you. That is grace." No, that is not grace at all. Grace means God came all the way down to connect with us (**Titus 2:11-14**). Jesus was God's gift of grace, and He brought God's grace down to us (**John 1:17**). In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said,

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."
(**John 3:16**).

The word for "gave" in Greek (charis) can be translated "gift" or "grace." (**The NAS Greek New Testament Lexicon**)

God's grace made it possible for us to be saved. His grace provided a plan of redemption, it was His grace that sent His Only Begotten Son to the earth to die for our sins. (**Romans 5:17-21**) It is through Christ that we can have access to God's grace. Paul wrote that it is through "our Lord Jesus Christ" that "we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (**Romans 5:1-2**). Grace teaches us how to respond to God's grace (**Titus 2:11-14**). God gives us grace to do what we need to do (**Luke 2:40; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 12:28**) Through God's grace we have the forgiveness of sins.

In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace (**Ephesians 1:7**). God extends His grace to us, but it is up to us to accept it (**John 1:12-13**). God's grace allows us to approach Him in prayer through Christ, our High Priest, "that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. ... The 'throne of grace' was another Jewish way of saying 'the throne of God.' It was typical of the Jews to avoid using God's name, in order not to misuse it. 'Throne' here is a euphemism for presenting God Himself. He is called the 'God of all grace' (**1 Peter 5:10**)." (**Hebrews 4:14-16**; Martel Pace, **Truth for Today Commentary on Hebrews**, pp. 270-272)

Peter urges us to continue to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord." (**2 Peter 3:18**). "Grace is extended by the Lord. It is something to be received with thanksgiving. Christ supplies grace; the Christian pursues knowledge."

When people say we are saved by "grace plus nothing," in the first place they don't really believe that themselves. As we have seen, they also include faith, and most of them include repentance and prayer. What they are contending for is not really grace, it is cheap grace. That term "cheap grace" originated with the German Theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He wrote

Cheap grace is the enemy of our church; we are fighting today for costly grace. ... Cheap grace is grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism, without church discipline, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." (**The Cost of Discipleship**).

Although Paul did not use this term, after saying "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more," he referred to the same concept of cheap grace when he wrote,

What shall we say them? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer in it? (**Romans 5:20; 6:1-2**)

That death occurs when by faith we are "baptized into Christ Jesus" (**Romans 6:3-7**). Grace does not cover sin. It is the pardon for sin, and sin is forgiven when we obey God. I should desire to obey God when I understand His grace. We cannot say we love God with "all of our heart, soul and mind" (**Mathew 22:37**), if we are unwilling to be obedient. Faith is my response to His grace. What is Faith?

[Faith is] Unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence; unquestioning belief in God... (**Webster's New World College Dictionary**).

We must not, however, conclude from this definition while proof is not necessary that no such proof exists. The evidence for faith in God far exceeds any suggested contradiction to that fact. The Hebrew writer wrote, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen" (**11:1**) Three translations say "the proof of what is not seen," rather than "evidence." (**CEV, WEB, CSB**) True evidence is sufficient proof. The Greek word for faith is *pistis*,

... which is used of belief with the predominate idea of trust in God or Christ. Faith means trust, confidence, assurance, and belief" (**The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words**, p. 1315)

The Hebrew word *emunah* means "faithfulness," trust or "trustworthy." (**Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17**).

True faith is more than just saying, or even actually believing in God. There is a difference in believing in God, and believing God. James reminded us that "the demons believe and tremble." (**James 2:19**) They not only believed, they also confessed Jesus to be the Son of God. (**Matthew 8:29**). James' point was that faith alone does not save a person. While faith involves intellectual assent, true Biblical faith involves acting on one's faith by obeying and serving God. Faith and obedience are not mutually exclusive. To see faith as unrelated to how we live our lives is a gross misunderstanding of faith. Genuine faith compels one to obey God. Obedient faith is the result of trusting in God and being willing to do what He asks of us. Obedience serves as the only real evidence that one truly believes. (**James 2:17-18**)

Many believe faith is a gift God gives us. They base it on **Ephesians 2:8-9** implying that grace and faith are both God's gifts to us. However, a close reading of the text will show this is not true. We have already accepted that grace is God's gift to us. That grace, however, is received through our faith in Him and in His Son. This line of reasoning comes from the fact that faith is something we have to do, and therefore, it is seen as a meritorious human work. It is neither a human work, nor a work done to earn salvation. Salvation cannot be earned; it is gift of God's grace, and that is exactly what **Ephesians 2:8** tells us. The "it," which is "the gift of God," is that "by grace you have been saved." Faith comes by "hearing the word of God." (**Romans 10:17**) Continuing study of God's word through what ever method it is received, will increase our faith and our knowledge of God, and of His Beloved Son, Jesus the Christ. In that sense "faith is a work of God." (**John 6:29**)

Some confuse the "spiritual gift of faith" with the faith received by reading, hearing and studying God's word. In discussing the spiritual gifts, those bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon select individuals, Paul adds "faith" (**1 Corinthians 12:9**). Spiritual gifts were given in the early history of the church to confirm the spoken word. (**Hebrews 2:4**). Peter wrote that "we have the prophetic word confirmed." (**2 Peter 1:19**) Once the New Testament was completed, those spiritual gifts ceased (**1 Corinthians 13:8-10**). We now have God's inspired word which is:

... profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteous that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (**2 Timothy 3: 3:16-17**).

In it, we have "all things that pertain to life and godliness." (**2 Peter 1:3**)

No Bible text related to spiritual gifts provides support for the idea that God

gives alien sinners the faith to believe. What was the spiritual gift of faith? Although the Apostles had been given the power "to cast our demons, and to heal all kinds of sickness, and all kinds of disease" (**Matthew 10:1**), they failed to cast a demon out of a man's demonic son. When they asked Jesus why they failed, He told them it was because of their "unbelief." He then went on to tell them,

"If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." (**Matthew 17:14- 21**)

Spiritual faith involves being thoroughly convinced of God's power and of His promise to accomplish His will and purpose, and for the believer to manifest such confidence in God that no circumstance or obstacle will not shake that conviction. During the age of spiritual gifts, it was that kind of faith which called upon God to act. While we cannot receive spiritual gifts today, it is the same kind of faith that saves us now. Having enough faith in God to believe He will keep His promise.

In addition to grace and faith, other things are involved in our receiving salvation that also are not human works of merit. Jesus joined faith and baptism together when He said,

"He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe [*that is, does not believe in Christ enough to be baptized; i.e., SSC*] will be condemned." (**Mark 16:16**)

Baptism, like faith, is not a human work of merit, it is a work of God. It is a logical step in obedient faith, and without faith it is useless. What would it mean for one to be immersed in water, if faith on our part were not present, and God was not involved in the process? An old adage says, 'You'd go down a dry sinner and come up a wet one.' When we by faith in Christ are buried with Him in baptism, God washes away our sins in Christ's blood (**Acts 22:16; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:14**). Peter, based upon the teaching of Christ, included repentance with baptism (**Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38**). Repentance is a change of heart, that leads to a change of direction, leading to a change of life. Confession of faith in Christ is connected to baptism (**Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9-10**). Living a faithful life is clear evidence of true faith in God, and in His saving grace (**Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11**).

—-- Sellers S. Crain, Jr., October, 2020