

Saved By Grace

Recently an article by an adherent to a “christian” cult was given to me. In it the writer stated that people erroneously teach that Paul taught salvation by faith alone apart from works. The belief of this particular group is that salvation is based either in whole in part upon man’s works. It is taught that good works for others and for God are necessary for salvation. Was the writer correct in calling the doctrine of salvation by faith alone apart from works, “erroneous”? What did Paul write concerning spiritual salvation?

Salvation is the work of God “... salvation, and this from God” (Philippians 1:28). It is God’s grace which is “saving unto all men” (Titus 2:11). The good news is God’s power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Spiritual salvation is based upon Christ’s death and resurrection (Romans 5:8, 10; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). God the Father applies the benefits of Christ’s work to the believer. The believer has eternal life because God the Son has been placed into him (1 John 5:11). The believer has redemption and forgiveness of sins because He is in Christ (Colossians 1:14). Justification, the act of declaring righteous, takes place in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30). The salvation which God has designed is far greater than these examples, having a depth which is exciting and demonstrates God’s extensive wisdom.

How does one obtain this salvation? Romans 4:5 “To him who works not, but believes . . .” Ephesians 2:8, 9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God, not from works so that no one can boast.” Titus 3:5 “Not from works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us . . .” Acts 13:38b-39 “...through this One, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed and from all things which you were not able to be declared righteous by Moses’ law, everyone believing is declared righteous by this One.” Galatians 2:16, “Knowing that a man is not declared righteous by law works, but through faith concerning Christ Jesus and we have believed into Christ Jesus in order that we might be declared righteous by faith concerning Christ and not by law works, because by law works, no flesh will be declared righteous.” Romans 3:20-22 “Wherefore, by law works, no flesh shall be declared righteous before Him, for through law is a full experiential knowledge of sin. But now, apart from law, a quality of God’s righteousness is made plainly visible by the Law and the Prophets, indeed, a righteousness from God through faith concerning Jesus Christ, unto all the ones believing for there is no difference.” Romans 3:27, 28 “Therefore, where is boasting shut out, through what sort of law? Through the works? No! But through a law of faith. For we logically count a man to be declared righteous by faith apart from law works.”

This sampling of verses clearly state that salvation is apart from works, apart from law works, apart from anything by which a man might boast. In Romans 4, Paul used Abraham and David as examples of justification by faith alone. Abraham lived before the law. Paul wrote that if Abraham was declared righteous from works, then he would have had something about which he could have boasted (v. 2). Paul quoted Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed God and it was logically counted to him for righteousness.” (v. 3). The historic evidence is that Abraham was declared righteous because he believed God, not because of works. Paul then pointed out that if one works, the wage is not logically counted to be according to grace but a debt (v. 4). If anyone could work for their salvation, then salvation would no longer be by grace. God would owe that person salvation. God owes no one anything! In this same letter, Paul wrote, “or who has ever given to Him [God] and he should be repaid.” (Romans 11:35). The answer is, no one! Therefore, salvation can not be based upon any human works.

At this point that some might state that faith is a work. However, in the very next verse, Romans 4:5, Paul stated, “to the one not working but believing...” Paul distinguished between

faith and works. He didn't consider faith a work. Faith is a requirement through which one must be saved but it is not a work.

When Jesus was upon the earth, He was once asked, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? And Jesus answered, this is the work from God, that you should believe in the One Whom He has sent." (John 6:28, 29). Does this contradict Paul's statement in Romans 4:5? This group of Jews wanted the bread that would remain unto eternal life (John 6:27). They thought there must be some work which they could do so they could receive that bread. Christ didn't give them a work to do but faith. Men, who always seek for a work which they can do for God instead of believing in what God has already done for them, would not believe in Him (John 6:36). Jesus was correct. The people grumbled and reasoned among themselves over His identity and refused to believe in Him (John 6:42, 43). Jesus knew from the beginning who believed in Him and who did not and eventually these unbelieving disciples stopped following Him (John 6:64, 66). Christ's point was, man seeks a work. Men do not want to believe but feel they are entitled to do something; they wish to earn their salvation; they want to do their part, but Christ required faith not a work. Christ did not contradict Paul's statement in Romans 4.

The second example Paul used in Romans 4 is David. David lived under the Law and yet even He knew that he was not declared righteous before God by works. David expressed the happiness of the man to whom God logically credits righteousness apart from works (Romans 4:6). Such a man's lawless deeds are forgiven and his sins are covered [an Old Testament concept]. God does not logically credit such a man's sins to him (Romans 4:7, 8). David, living under the law, knew that God was providing these benefits apart from any works.

Some passages seem to contradict these, however, the context of each will clarify the intent. Romans 2:6,7

"Who will repay to each according to his works, on the one hand, to the ones seeking glory and honor and incorruption by patience and good works - eternal life, but on the other hand, to the ones who out of selfish ambition disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness, wrath and fury." Paul was addressing men who were judging others, believing they themselves would escape judgment (2:1). In verses 2 and 3 the Greek pronoun "such things" [*toiouta*] refers to the "unrighteous" activities listed in 1:29-32. These individuals were practicing the very things listed and at the same time judging others for practicing the same. Later in verse 17 we find that he specifically addressed the Jews, who were resting upon their law. They boasted in their law and yet did not practice the law (vv. 21-22). Such men never change their minds [repent] regarding God and therefore treasure up for themselves wrath for a day of wrath (vv. 4-5). Verses 6-7 therefore, are not intended to point out the basis of salvation but the basis of judgment.

The Jew, self-secure in the law, does not realize that he too will face this judgment, if he has not "obeyed the truth" (v. 7). The Truth is found in 1:18, 25. The Truth is a proper view of God, Who is Truth! Mankind suppresses the truth by means of unrighteousness. These don't obey the truth but obey unrighteousness. Mankind exchanged the truth concerning God for the lie. These despise God's kindness and longsuffering (2:4). "Obeying the truth" is an act of faith. If they would recognize who God is, they would obey God's one requirement - believe! Paul states this later in 10:16 "they have not all obeyed the gospel . . . believed our report." (cp 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 12; 1 Timothy 2:4). Obedience must always be determined by context. If God requires one to submit, then the act of submission would be obedience. Since God requires people to believe the gospel, obedience is the act of believing. The practice of those not believing is described in verse 8. Paul is not contradicting what he will later write in 4:2.

Christ also promised that those who believed in Him would never enter into judgment (John 6:24). Therefore, the only ones facing this judgment are those who have not believed. Those being judged receive two different qualities of wrath [*thumos* and *orge*] (Romans 2:8). God's undiluted wrath is reserved for Daniel's 70th Week [the Tribulation] (Revelation 14:10). God's wrath is completed [*teleo*] by the seven bowls of God's wrath (Revelation 15:1). Wrath, in either form, is never associated with Hell [the Lake of Fire]. Hell is God's righteous judgment, not wrath. God completes His wrath during the Tribulation. Therefore, the wrath which is being stored up for a day of wrath and righteous judgment comes in Daniel's 70th Week.

James 2:24 is frequently used to prove that salvation is by works. Some even pit James against Paul. However, the context of James 2 is even easier to explain. James is addressing brothers (v. 14), therefore, other believers. These believing Jews have been scattered from their homeland (1:1). They need to care for one another and not merely look out for themselves. They need to exercise faith in meeting the needs of other believers (2:15-16). If they do not, then "how can that faith **save** him?" In this passage "save" is not used of initial salvation but of present tense salvation, popularly called "growth". How can a believer grow if he doesn't use faith to produce works. Then, in this same context, justification is present tense justification, in the life of a believer. Which is what James states of Abraham in verse 22, "and out of his works, his faith was matured" [Aorist Passive verb]. Abraham did a work approximately thirty years after God declared him righteous. That work was a maturing point for Abraham and by it he was declared righteous before men. Abraham had something by which he could now boast, but not before God. He could show his faith by his works (v.)18!

No man is declared righteous by works in the sight of God. Salvation is by grace through faith alone! Any addition confounds the work of Christ. "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness is by law, then Christ died with out a reason." (Galatians 2:21).