

HOW IS A PERSON MADE RIGHT WITH GOD?

Christianity and religion take divergent views to this question. All religions take the position that people can do certain things to bring themselves into right standing with God. Unfortunately, many Christian denominations err to that conclusion. But what does the Bible really teach? What does the grace of God mean? How do we attain it? What part does obedience play? Apparently God knew that salvation by grace through faith was a foreign concept to us humans. Most of us are performance oriented, i.e., we believe our value is based on our performance. Almost the entire books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews (in addition of many passages in other New Testament books) were written so that we could have understanding.

It is clear that from the beginning when Adam and Eve sinned against God, there was a separation from God. They hid from God. God sought them and shed innocent blood to cover their nakedness. Although Adam was created in God's image, we are told that he brought forth children in his own image – also separated from God. The image had been distorted by sin. The core of all sin is unbelief – not believing what God says. It is only logical that when we reject the truth, whatever we believe then is a lie. How does God bring us back into relationship with Him? How does He restore His image in us? Is it by our good works? Or the receiving by faith?

*“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: **Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?**” Galatians 3:1-4* Some Christians have the same problem the Galatians had; they believe that they received salvation by faith, but now they must perform to keep it. They do not understand that God both forgives us and keeps us.

In scripture, believers are called children of Abraham, not children of Moses. Why? Romans 4:1-8 “What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” **Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,** just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.” It is clear that righteousness is a gift of God and not based upon our merit. We humble ourselves before God, cry out for His mercy and receive His grace provided through the cross.

God gave Israel the law to reveal His holiness. The entire book of Hebrews teaches us that the blood of bulls and goats and all the ceremonial Law of Moses was a shadow of the reality that would come through Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant was written on

tables of stone, but the New Covenant is written on our hearts. Hebrews 10:16-18 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,**" then He adds, **"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."** Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin." The Law shows us our failure; we have missed the mark. No matter how hard we try, we cannot keep it. The law is perfect, but we are weak. If we strive to be right with God through the law, we must keep ALL of it perfectly. Galatians 3:10-12 **"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."** But that **no one is justified by the law in the sight of God** is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

Galatians 3:19-25 "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! **For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.** But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the **law was our tutor to bring us to Christ,** that we might be justified by faith. But **after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."**

Galatians 5:1-4 "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. **You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."**

For to fail in one point is to fail to keep it. Without the law, there is no grace. I believe that is why so many do not understand or appreciate God's grace today. Until I see myself hopelessly lost, a sinner separated from a Holy God with no ability to bring myself to Him, I have no need of grace. "If righteousness come by the law, Christ is dead in vain." Because we live in a generation where there is little concept of sin and anything goes, there is little understanding of the need for God's grace nor appreciation of it. If I can somehow earn my way to God by my good works, what is the point of the cross? Can I add anything to the cross? What did Jesus mean when He cried out, "It is finished!" 2 Corinthians 5:21 "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

When we accept God's forgiveness through faith in Christ and receive His gift of righteousness, we are made "acceptable in the beloved." Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of

God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” We have access to come boldly into His presence without fear, for ALL our sins are forgiven.

When this transaction takes place, our heart is changed. Then the entire Christian life becomes a matter of our salvation working itself from our heart throughout the whole life. Yes, we need deliverance; we need healing; we need to renew our minds; we must make choices to follow Him in everything. But because our desires have changed, we WANT to obey Him. If a person’s heart and desires have not changed, that person has no assurance that he actually is a child of God. I have heard people say, “If I believed all my sins are forgiven and I am righteous because of grace, I would just sin all I want to.” Precisely, my point! The heart has not changed. A true believer may fail many times in his ignorance or immaturity, but his heart desires righteousness. If he understands God’s grace, he will run TO God when he fails, not AWAY from Him. God’s grace is an active power that works inside of us. When we believe all that God has done for us and who He has re-created us to be, we become passionate followers whose delight is to do His will.

Jesus summed up the law (which He fulfilled perfectly for us) with two commandments: Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Galatians 5:13-15,18 “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”