Are We Saved by Works?

Jon Mitchell

"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" (Eph. 2:8-9). From this passage we see that we are saved by God's grace through our faith, and that we did not save ourselves, but rather our salvation is a gift from God (Rom. 6:23
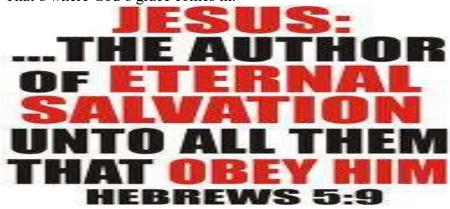
However, the Bible also has more to say about this question, and we must not ignore what its entirety says (Ps. 119:160). Notice that Paul said that we are saved not only *"by grace,"* but also *"through faith."* What is faith?

The Bible has a lot to say about faith. It is necessary for salvation (Mark 16:16), it is necessary to please God (Heb. 11:6), and it is defined both as *"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence for things not seen"* (Heb. 11:1) and believing that *"(God) is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11:6).

Does faith have anything to do with works? The Bible asks, *"What does it profit…if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?…Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"*(James 2:14, 17). So we see that in order to have a living faith, a faith that pleases God, we must have works. Otherwise, our faith is dead.
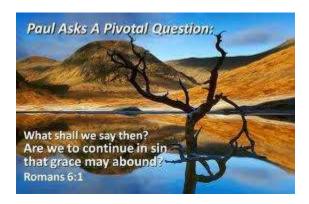
So what does the Ephesians passage mean when it says that we are saved by grace through faith and not of works? If you go back to that passage and skip down to verse 10, you'll see that we were created for good works, works of obedience (cf. Eccl. 12:13). When we do "works," i.e., obey God, we are only doing what we were supposed to be doing in the first place (Luke 17:5-10).

However, we all sin (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). When we sin, our just God requires a penalty for that sin (Rom. 2:8-9). It is through his love and grace that Christ paid that debt on the cross (John 3:16). We could not pay it because of our sin that requires the debt to be paid in the first place (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, no works that we do could save us because our sin cancels out those works. That's where God's grace comes in.

Nevertheless, God still requires us to obey him if we want salvation (Heb. 5:9), even though he has offered us his grace (Rom. 6:1). If we truly believe that he *"is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6), then our faith will prompt us to obey him (James 2:14-26). Thus, we are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8).

Think about it. The last time you gave into a temptation to do something that you know the Bible says is a sin, did you truly believe God's Word at that moment in time when you gave in and committed the sin anyway? If you had, then you would not have committed the sin. Your faith was weak.

God's grace saves us, but that grace teaches us to live righteously (Tit. 2:11-12). We will do so if we have faith. If we don't have faith, we will live unrighteously and thus will not be saved by His grace in the end (Rev. 21:8). Will grace save us if we don't follow grace's teachings? God very explicitly says, "No." (Rom. 6:1-2)

Are you allowing the grace of God to bring salvation to your soul? Obey God's Word and become a Christian through penitent, confessed faith in the Son of God and his kingdom (Matt. 10:32-33; Acts 8:12; Rom. 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 7:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:9-11) and baptism into his body for salvation and the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Pet. 3:21). Remain faithfully obedient by walking in the light of fellowship with God by continually confessing and repenting of your sins (Matt. 7:21-27; Rev. 2:10; 1 John 1:7-9; Heb. 10:26-31; Luke 13:3,5).

Don't receive the grace of God in vain.