

You Can't Lose Out

on Salvation...

or Can You?

Jesus Christ, the God and Savior of mankind, told a young man, “if you will enter into life, keep the commandments!” Paul said, “by grace are ye saved through faith; not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Are these contradictory scriptures? If they are, who has the “weightier” word? If they are not, how can they be reconciled?

“Saved by grace through faith”

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, wrote, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). Christians use this passage of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians to support a 'no-works' salvation doctrine and use it as a license to disobey the commandments of God, especially the Fourth Commandment, the Sabbath. One of the main doctrines of many 'born-again' groups is that “Jesus nailed the Ten Commandments to the cross” therefore it is no longer to be kept. Jesus allegedly replaced the “Ten Commandments” with the “LOVE Commandment.” But what is Love? How should Christians show “love to God” which is the greatest commandment, and “love to neighbors” which is the second great commandment? The Bible clearly teaches that to love God, one must “not have any other god besides God, not make any graven images as representation of God, not use God's name in vain, and to keep the Sabbath holy and hold a 'holy convocation' on that day to worship God!” (Exodus 20) The Bible also teaches that to show love towards neighbor, one must not “steal, commit murder, commit adultery, bear false witness, and covet anything that belongs to his neighbor” and a person

ought to honor his parents. Does it seem like the Ten Commandments has been done away? Absolutely not, how can it be when the Ten Commandments DEFINE the very essence of Love?

Why did Paul say then that Christians are “saved by grace, not by works” lest any man should boast? Salvation is a gift of God, something He gives with pleasure to His most precious creation—Mankind. But does this mean that whether a man does 'good' or 'bad' that it wouldn't matter? That God, out of His abundant mercy and grace, would save humans regardless of their actions? If the only passage of Scripture that deals with the subject of “salvation” is this letter of Paul to the Ephesians, it would seem so. Fortunately, there are other writings, including Paul's, that give a better understanding on this very important subject.

Keep the Commandments

Matthew quoted Christ as saying, “And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:16-17)

The question was very simple and very clear it leaves no room for doubt. The young man is virtually asking Jesus how to be saved, and have eternal life. And Jesus' response was also very clear and definite even a grade school child can understand, “keep the commandments!” Is Jesus teaching a different doctrine than Paul? Jesus was very plain in telling the young man that if he will enter or 'receive' eternal life, he will have to keep the

Commandments. And as if that wasn't clear enough, the young man even asked which commandments, and Jesus was kind enough to indulge him. Jesus' response is found in Matthew 19:18-19:

“He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (King James Version)

Salvation IS to 'receive eternal life.' Jesus cannot be misunderstood unless one chooses to be blind and decides to go “against” what He is teaching. It is commonly accepted that Paul was personally taught by Jesus Christ, is it possible for Paul to have misunderstood Jesus? Very unlikely. Jesus is very God, the Savior of mankind who offered Himself as a sacrifice. He is all-knowing, all-wise and He has the power to give life and to take it. Is it possible for Jesus to have “misunderstood” the Father's intent that salvation is by grace and not by works? Very unlikely. Could Jesus have forgotten that one does not need to keep the law because salvation is “by grace”?

Matthew's direct quotation of the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 19 is unmistakable. It is contrary to the idea that Jesus came to “keep the law in our place” so that Christians don't have to keep it. To interpret it otherwise is a serious mistake and self-deluding. Besides, if Jesus meant the law will be done away by His sacrifice, this would have been the perfect opportunity to teach that concept. Jesus could have simply told the young man, “Who told you that you have to do anything? Did I not say I came to obey the

law so that you don't have to keep it? I am going to 'nail the law' to the cross and do away with it." But that's not what Jesus said, in fact, Jesus required more from the young man which made him leave with heaviness of heart! (Matthew 19:21-22)

Matthew did not stop quoting Jesus from there, he continued, "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'" (Matthew 19:23-24)

If there were no 'works' required to enter the Kingdom, Jesus would not have said the "rich" would have a hard time entering the Kingdom. And yet, Jesus said, it would be hard for them, hard enough that it would be easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye. In fact, Jesus is almost saying it's near to impossible for a rich person to make it. How can that be if there were no "works" required for salvation and only "grace" is necessary? The disciples understood it

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 7:21

quite clearly, hence their reaction in Matthew 19:25:

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Indeed, if there were some very serious requirements like keeping the "entire" Ten Commandments as Jesus clearly pointed out, who can be saved? On the other hand, if "God's grace" is all a Christian needs, without any works, why would Jesus say "if you will enter into life, keep the commandments?" There is no necessity for Jesus to even sacrifice himself if the Father will save humans anyway if "salvation is by grace alone!" However, Jesus made it very clear that obedience to the Ten Commandments is necessary. Is Paul trying to contradict the statement of his very God and Savior Jesus Christ? Is Paul trying to say he knows better than Jesus Christ? Not likely. Yet, in almost every Christian church that one attends, Pastors teach their congregation they are free to break the law because "they are nailed to the cross!" This is definitely contrary to what Jesus told the woman caught in adultery,

"go and sin no more..." (John 8:11)

The Parable of the Talent and the Pounds

Two particular parables, Matthew 25 and Luke 19, the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Pounds, present a very interesting concept of what the Kingdom of God is like.

Matthew 25:14-30, For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. ... He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strowed: And I was afraid, and went and

hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strowed: Thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (see also Luke 19:12-27).

Jesus starts the parable with "The kingdom of heaven is like..." which means whatever the message he is teaching has to do with becoming a part of that kingdom. These parables show two basic patterns, first, the servants who "performed well" were rewarded and second, the servants who "failed to perform" were thrown out.

How Jesus dealt with each one of

them should make Christians think seriously about entering the Kingdom of God. Those whose talents and pounds had gained or increased gained entry into the kingdom but those who had kept theirs, and did not gain anything were thrown into a place where there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Again, Jesus is saying Christians are "required" to "do something" or suffer the consequences, being thrown out!

"Not Everyone That Says to me, Lord, Lord"

Matthew 7: 21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Again, this teaching of Jesus and what Christians of today generally believe are in direct opposition. "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" is a common phrase spoken by "bus preachers" and "street evangelists" as well as those in the television programs. There will be a group of people, according to Jesus, who believes in Him, calls on Him, but would still be denied entry into the Kingdom unless they do God's will. In fact, he goes a step farther by saying that even if there were "good works" accompanying their belief, like driving out demons, prophesying in Jesus' name, and even performing miracles of healing, that these people will still not enter the Kingdom.

The possibility of losing out on salvation, as implied by the teachings of Jesus Christ himself, is very real. Christians should take heed and listen to Jesus' warning or miss out. There are "works" that one must definitely perform in order to please God and gain entry into that kingdom. Christians must not get comfortable in their perception and definition of "good works" because they may not be the kind of "works" that is expected by God. One interesting concept that is apparent in the teachings of Jesus is that he seems to be more concerned with how men live their lives than anything else. In the famous "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7, the emphasis is heavily placed on personal relations with neighbors than any "doctrinal discussion" or advancement of some "theological concept."

Perhaps one would be wise to ponder on the teachings of Jesus Christ, and even of Paul himself. They were teaching obedience to the commandments and

encouraging the disciples to live “good lives”. If there were no “good works” necessary for salvation, why even bother to devote lengthy hours of discussion teaching it?

“Shall not enter into the Kingdom of God”

It is evident that Jesus is an advocate of “salvation by good works.” But what about Paul? Wasn't he teaching “salvation by grace without works”? Didn't Paul say Christians “are saved by grace and not by works lest we should boast?” Is Paul contradicting the very teachings of Jesus Christ, his Savior and God? Contrary to popular belief that Paul is teaching a “salvation by grace without works,” his letters to the Corinthian and Galatian churches specifically mention that not

serious consequences. Engaging in sexual acts outside of marriage is unacceptable to God and those who believe otherwise will not enter the Kingdom. Besides fornication, God also does not like adulterers, effeminate, those who engage in sexual practices with the same sex, thieves, covetous people, drunkards, revilers and no one who practices such will enter the Kingdom. Any Christian who claims God is his Father must be of like mind with his Creator God, and obey Him.

Think about it for a moment, if “works” were unimportant to God and He would save humans regardless of what they do because He is merciful, why would Paul say certain acts would prevent them from entering the Kingdom? Obviously, there are certain “works” that

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I Corinthians 6:9-10

everyone will enter the kingdom because of some “works.”

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (I Corinthians 6:9-10, see also Galatians 5:19-21).

This present generation believes that “fornication” or having sexual relations outside of marriage is an acceptable practice. God, however, does not share this belief. He requires the acceptance of His righteous standards or there will be

is so displeasing to God the result of which He will choose not to apply grace or mercy.

Paul is correct in teaching that salvation is a gift of God. But he is nowhere saying there is nothing you need to do in order to receive that gift. Paul is teaching that one's “self-righteousness” cannot force or oblige God to give eternal life. One can't buy immortality with his show of “good works”. But if Christians do the things that are pleasing to God, be obedient to Him and attain that level of maturity that Jesus, Paul and all the apostles were teaching 2000 years ago, God is going to grant that precious gift of immortality.

“Neglect so great a Salvation”

The writer of Hebrews warns that salvation can be neglected:

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” (Hebrews 2: 3)

Yes, Christians are saved by God's grace and salvation is a gift of God. No amount of great work or performance can make someone earn it. Neither can anyone save himself or give himself immortality no matter how good he is. Only God gives this gift but it is clear that before God grants “immortality,” Christians must do the works that are pleasing to Him. This is precisely what Jesus himself said:

“Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but ONLY he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)

And what is the will of the Father? According to Jesus, to believe in Him whom God has sent. (John 6:29) That is to believe in all the teachings of Jesus Christ, to believe in His sacrifice and to trust in His promises! And how can one gain eternal life and enter the Kingdom? First, Jesus said, “keep the commandments.” Second, according to Paul, to stay away from the “works of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:19-21)

In the simplest of terms, salvation is dependent upon obedience or disobedience to God. Was Paul correct in saying “by grace are ye saved through faith, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God?” Definitely! It is through belief and faith in Jesus Christ through God's grace that we are saved, not by our own power or goodness, because salvation is a gift of God! [Rene D. Corpuz, **AG**]