

GRACE A GIFT, FAITH OUR RESPONSE

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Ephesians 2. 8 states, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”

Grace has been described as the unmerited favour of the goodness of God. It is something that is undeserved. It is the gift of God and there are many scriptures to show that not only is grace a gift of God but that it is freely given (Acts 11.23, 13.43, Romans 3.24, 5.15). We are sinners and do not deserve this grace but it is freely given and given unconditionally. It was given to sinful man as, for example, the apostle Paul (1 Timothy 1. 12ff). It is the means of salvation (Acts 15.11). No one can be saved without the grace of God.

Titus 2. 11 is an important verse. It states, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to ALL men.”

Two vital truths are here. Without God’s grace, there would be no salvation for anyone. The second truth is that salvation is possible and available to everyone. This is amplified by Paul in 1 Timothy 2. 3ff which reads, “God our Saviour will have ALL men to be saved and come to ALL knowledge of ALL the truth.” This truth is sometimes referred to as God’s universal call. In other words, salvation is possible to everyone but that does not mean that everyone will be saved.

There are many other scriptures to confirm this. In Isaiah 45. 22 God says, “Look unto me ALL the ends of the earth and be saved.” The people had to look and to make that choice. Moses had to do likewise at the burning bush. He could have refused and looked away.

Another clear Biblical teaching is that man can choose or refuse to hearken to God’s voice and ignore His call (Psalm 51.11, Isaiah 65.12, Jeremiah 7.13, Hosea 9.17 etc.). When presented with God’s grace some would not come or respond (Matthew 22.3, John 5.40) and this was the case with the Jews (Romans 10. 31).

Clearly people have the choice to accept or refuse God’s offer of grace. They have to decide for themselves (Deuteronomy 30.15ff, Joshua 24.15, 1 Kings 18.21 and Mathew 10.21, a very telling verse).

There are Christians who do not believe in freewill. Freewill is the ability to make a personal choice without pressure or influence from any other source. It is an expression of personal choice not determined by physical forces, Fate or God (Collins Dictionary).

We have already quoted verses which refer to man making his own choice concerning God’s provisions and grace. We shall later deal with the Biblical truth that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved and that we have the choice to work out our own salvation.

It is the goodness and grace of God that leads people to conviction and repentance (Romans 2. 4) and, upon repentance, they are to be baptised (Acts 2.38) and follow Christian doctrine and practice with fellowship, sharing the things of God and the Lord Jesus, and breaking bread (ACTS 20.7) and praying together (Acts 2.42).

In this, they exercised faith and this was their ‘constitution ‘after salvation and they ‘ co-operated ‘ with God. The apostle Paul make it clear when he says, “Save yourselves” (Acts 2.21, Romans 10.13, 1 Timothy 2.4, Titus 2.11 and 2 Peter 3. 9). Paul repeats this in Philippians 2. 12 when he writes, “Work out your own salvation.”

People make their own choices but this doctrine is rejected by Calvinists who insist that before the world

began God selected who were to be saved and therefore who were not going to be saved. They call this predestination but the Scriptures state that whom God did foreknow (who were to be saved) were predestined to be holy, blameless and with love. This is why God says to us, Be ye holy because I am holy.

God did not conduct a random selection as to whom He was going to save. The relevant word is whosoever and the scriptural teaching is that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2. 21, Romans 10.13, 1 Timothy 2.4, Titus 2.11, 2 Peter 3.9). The Lord Jesus said the same in John 3.16. One cannot argue against such obvious truths.

Faith is not a gift of God. Nowhere in the scriptures is faith called a gift. If faith is a gift from God then that makes a mockery of the Lord Jesus rebuking His disciples for their lack of faith and His marvelling at the faith of a Gentile (Matthew 8.10).

Some Calvinists believe that faith is a gift of God and this therefore means that God choose who was going to be saved and gave them the faith and grace to be saved. Therefore there is no freewill or personal choice. It is all cut and dried by God and no one can alter it.

If this is so, then faith cannot ever be weak or inferior. God does not give weak and failing gifts. People are told in God's Word to have faith. The disciples wanted their faith to be increased. The Lord would not have upbraided the disciples for their little faith if faith was a gift of God.

While it is true that God is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12.1) this must mean that He is the originator and inventor of faith just as He created mountains and rivers. Paul makes it clear that he has kept his faith (2 Timothy 4. 7). That faith is man's personal choice is also set out in 2 Timothy 2.22 where we are told to flee youthful lusts and follow righteousness, faith, charity and peace and that is of our choice.

Those who are saved, whether Jew or Gentile, are called the elect. That word can be, and is misunderstood. It implies God has made his selection as to who are to be saved. But this election is equivalent to the teaching that when we are saved we adopted into God's family. We have elected to be His.

Some of the elect erred concerning the faith (1 Timothy 6.21) and yet had professed it (1 Timothy 5. 8).

There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism (Ephesians 4.5) and yet the Calvinists believe that there was a church in the Old Testament which is the same as the church in the New Testament which cannot be true. The church means 'those called out' and one could say this of the Hebrew nation. The religion of the Old Testament was Judaism and it is Christianity in the New Testament.

Paul writes that he lives by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2.20).

The Hebrew epistle refers to the old covenant in the Old Testament which is done away with for there is a new covenant in the blood of Christ (Hebrews 8.8ff. Hebrews 9. 11ff)

Grace is a gift of God that can lead a sinner to repentance. Faith is clearly our response, our choice and our decision.

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