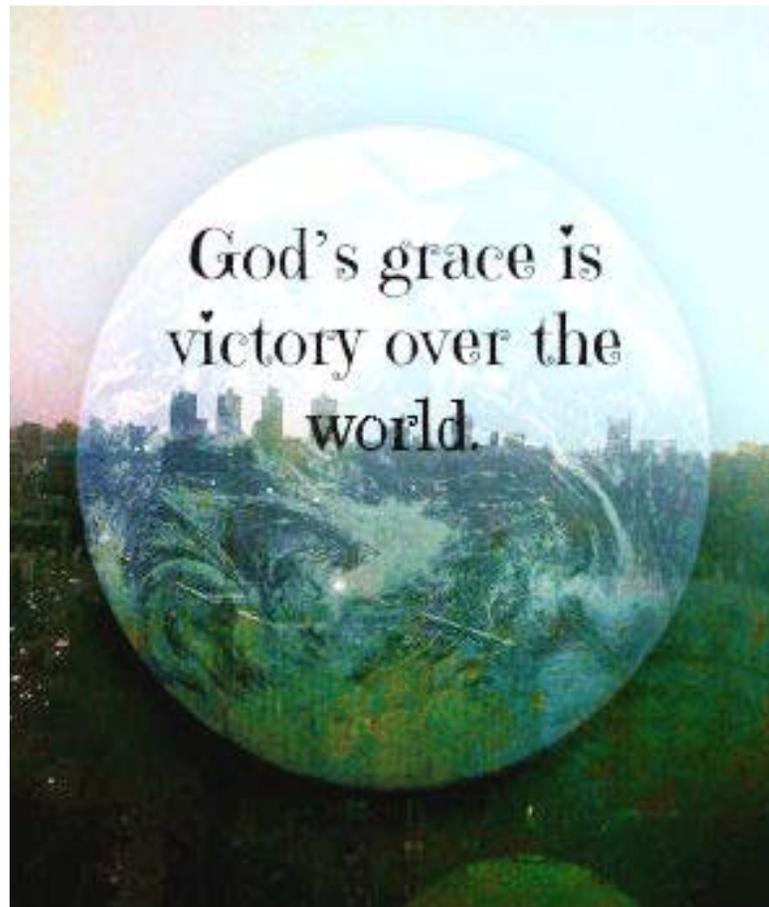


Acts Book Three

Can You *See* Grace?



Booklet Three in the Series
of Sermons on Acts Preached by
Pastor Kevin Redig
January-May 2016

Foreword

Sharing even a small portion of what God's Word has to say on the topics of grace, salvation and faith should always be a blessing. In this case, we delved into them as part of a study of the Church as it gained momentum, grew, and began to fulfill its mandate to reach the world for Christ as recorded in the pages of the book of Acts. Of course, you won't be surprised that all three, grace, salvation, and faith, are evident as God took the first step in revealing to us the principles by which His Church is to be His body with a singular mission to make disciples.



I trust you will be blessed by these reminders of things we hold dear.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Redig'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kevin Redig

During the first half of 2016, Pastor Kevin Redig preached a series of sermons entitled *The Church in Principle and Practice* inspired by the Book of Acts. Four of those sermons have been put into booklet form:

Booklet 1: *Is The Message Still Relevant?*

Booklet 2: *Who Can Come? How Do You Come?*

Booklet 3: *Can You See Grace?*

Booklet 4: *Guarding the Gospel!*

Introduction

We begin in Acts 11:19 at a point of changing narrative. The preceding verses provide the fascinating story of how it came to be that Peter found himself in the house of a Gentile when, shockingly to the Jews, those Gentiles were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. The narrative now picks up another thread which focuses on Saul and the continuation of a growing ministry to Gentiles.

This new story line begins in Verse 19 with a reminder of the persecution that began back in Acts 8, immediately following the stoning of Stephen. This is the third time this tragedy has been mentioned in an “all things work together for good” context. This persecution brought the Gospel to Samaria, Damascus, and now even further into Gentile environs.

Trusting Through Trials

Let’s just pause for a minute and think about persecution and its impact on the Gospel. Let me draw your attention to I Timothy 2:2-4:

Intercede for all who are in authority. . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior who desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

This passage begins with an important reminder to pray for those in positions of authority throughout our land, but it also tells us the reason why, that we may lead a “quiet and peaceable life.” That’s because this is the best environment for the Gospel to be proclaimed and saved people to grow. War, turmoil and lack of the basic necessities all increase the challenges faced by the Church.

But Chapters 8-11 of the book of Acts bring us face to face with an important reminder. The persecution that sprang up after Stephen's martyrdom didn't stifle the Church; but rather, caused it to expand and grow. You see it is precisely because God our Savior desires all men to be saved, that He uses persecution of His Church as another means to accomplish His purposes.

This is a validation of Romans 8:28 in that it takes something which is not good (persecution) and uses it for good (the spreading of the Gospel and the growing of the Church). Evangelism is best done in times of peace, but God can use persecution to achieve His own ends, and that's the history of the Church



down through the ages. Our calling is to trust Him. Therefore, we need to settle this in our own thinking, especially as we see things turning in our country.

Perhaps you heard about the statement recently released from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (this is an agency of our Federal Government) which, in essence, said that religious freedoms are an impediment to civil rights, especially as they are related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Let that sink in for a minute. An agency of our government is telling us that the religious freedoms guaranteed under the First Amendment to the Constitution are the problem in that they stand against certain aspects of the sexual revolution and moral decline that has gained such traction in America.

We should definitely be able to see that persecution is on the horizon for those who hold to any kind of Biblical Christianity. So pray for those in authority, but also realize that, come peace or persecution, God can use it for good among those who are willing to hold to the truth and be a light in an increasingly dark place!

Not only did the persecution that followed the stoning of Stephen result in evangelism in Samaria, but, according to Acts 11:19, it caused some who were scattered to preach as far away as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. The two major cities of Phoenicia were Tyre and Sidon, and so, as you can see from the map, the persecution in Jerusalem caused Christianity to be taken progressively further north along the Mediterranean, all of the way to Antioch and out to the island of Cyprus.



Take note of Tarsus, which is just west along the top of the Mediterranean from Antioch. To give you some idea of scale, Antioch is about 300 miles from Jerusalem. As the narrative unfolds, we see that initially those who fled preached the Gospel to Jews only. However, there were also those who were from predominantly Greek areas who began to preach Christ to the “Hellenists,” a reference to Gentiles. So what happened? Verse 21 tells us that,

...a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

Once again, we see how repentance and belief go hand in hand. You do not turn and believe in someone in whom you haven't previously been trusting, without a change of mind. And you don't believe in a Savior who died for your sins, without seeing yourself as a sinner in need of such a Savior. As we have seen throughout our study of the book of Acts, there are many things you can turn from, but only one thing you can turn to—and that is the Lord Jesus Christ!

A New Ministry

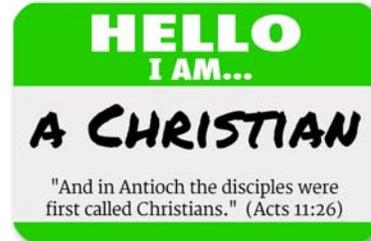
When news reached Jerusalem that a great number of Gentiles had turned to the Lord, they responded by sending out Barnabas to investigate. You can almost imagine their consternation: Was God really going to accept more than just a token few *good* gentiles like Cornelius? Thankfully, Barnabas was the perfect man to send. The text says:

*When he came and had seen the grace of God
he was glad. Acts 11:23*

This good and spirit-filled man encouraged these new believers to continue with the Lord, and even more Gentiles believed and were added to the fledgling Church in Antioch. In Verse 25, something happens that might appear strange at first glance. Right in the midst of “many” being added, Barnabas takes off for Tarsus on a mission to find Saul. You might be asking, “Why is he leaving these new believers? Isn't there ministry to be done?” You are absolutely right, and Barnabas realizes he is in way over his head. What all of these new believers really need is to grow in the faith, and I suspect Barnabas left because he knew just the man for the job. I think the fact that Barnabas brought Paul back to Antioch, and that the two of them ministered to the newly saved believers for a full year, supports this hypothesis.

We should also understand that by the time of this narrative, Paul has about nine years of ministry experience and has been divinely prepared for the task of ministering to these new believers.

One interesting thing to note at the close of Verse 26. It tells us that the term “Christians” was first applied to this group of believers growing under the year-long ministry of Paul and Barnabas. This is noteworthy for two reasons.



- Until this time, Christianity was seen more as some kind of Jewish sect or offshoot, rather than a separate entity in its own right. It has now been recognized by the Gentile community as a distinct entity with its own beliefs.
- I find the word itself an encouragement. Naturally, you can see the word Christ as the root. The word Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Messiah, both of which mean the anointed one. That is, the one anointed by God to save mankind. The suffix added to Christ to make it Christian is a Latin word adding the idea of follower. Do you see what is wrapped up in the word Christian? A Hebrew concept translated into Greek (the language of trade throughout the empire) with a Roman ending. That about covers everyone in Europe and Asia. Who can come? Anyone! For Jesus is the Savior of the world!

Now that we understand the flow of events associated with this chapter, I want to draw your attention to one particular verse and the ramifications that go along with it. For there are some very important things for us to add to our understanding of how it is that God is building His church.

The Grace of God

Take a look with me at Acts 11:23:

*When he (Barnabas) came and
had seen the grace of God. . .*

It says he saw the grace of God, but what exactly did he see? Verse 21 refers to the hand of God being at work, and that a great number believed and turned to the Lord. The “these things” of Verse 22 refer to the news that Gentiles were getting saved. And then when Barnabas arrives on the scene, he is declared to have “seen the grace of God.” So again I ask, “What did he see?”

He saw lost people getting saved! Here is a Principle for you: *You are seeing the grace of God every time a lost person gets saved.* There are many aspects of why this is the case, let’s start with Colossians 1:13-14:

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and
conveyed us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love
in whom we have redemption through His blood,
the forgiveness of sins.*

Whenever a person believes the Gospel, and by that we mean places their faith in the person and work of Christ, then take note of just one of the many things that happen. That lost person—and part of that lostness is to have been held captive within the dominion of darkness—has been delivered out of darkness and into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Our faith leads to redemption, to be brought out of spiritual captivity and set free, and that can only be had through the One Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ! This is a miracle of the highest order. It is a supernatural occurrence that only God can orchestrate. When this miracle occurs and we see the outcome, then we are seeing the grace of God in action!

Let's explore this phrase further: “. . .**had seen the grace of God.** . . .” Since it is absolutely clear that what was seen was saved souls, we need to better understand grace and how it is related to salvation. We can start with the Greek word translated grace, which is *charis*. Although not a complicated word, it has gathered much meaning as the result of its Biblical usage.

- If you look *charis* up in a lexicon (basically a dictionary), you will find it defined as favor, loving-kindness, thanks. This is a good place to start, but even now we should have a sense there is more to it than that.
- If you look up the word in a theological dictionary, you are likely to get an explanation that focuses on the idea of “unmerited favor.” In other words, blessing that comes to a person for which they did not work or did not deserve.
- Lastly, we can consider its meaning by looking at its usage throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This opens the meaning up to a certain degree of subjectivity, but can also be very helpful. I have looked at the use of grace throughout the Bible, here is my understanding of what grace means in a spiritual context: start with the idea of **unmerited favor**, and add to it the idea that **God's grace is His abundant answer to our ever-changing need!**



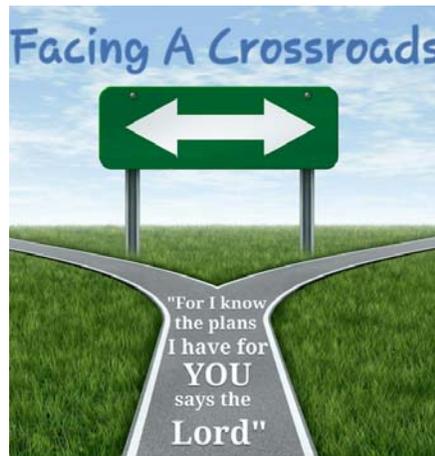
What does a lost person need most? Eternal salvation—and the Bible does say, “. . .**by grace are we saved.** . . .” But notice that I have expanded the definition beyond only a lost person getting saved.

Grace For the Saved and Unsaved

In addition to saving grace, the Bible also speaks of common grace (blessings that come to all people), sanctifying grace, sufficient grace, surpassing grace, and a number of other categories of grace. That is because no matter what kind of need man has, especially one of God's children, God has an answer for it. II Corinthians 9:8 speaks to this:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Let me extend this a little bit by making it clear that lost mankind stands at a crossroads when it comes to trying to be able to somehow be acceptable before a holy God. Will he rely on his own efforts or will he turn and trust in that which the grace of God has provided? Likewise, Christians stand at exactly the same crossroads with respect to living the Christian Life! Will we try to live lives pleasing to God by means of our own abilities and strength or will we follow the pattern laid out for our salvation, and look to the grace of God to provide the means of living the life that He desires for each of us? This issue is so important! Here is a ***Point of Application*** I trust you will take with you:



A saved person is no less in need of the grace of God than a lost person!

You see, grace for the lost is having his or her sins forgiven, obtaining a righteousness acceptable to a holy God, and having the kind of life suited for eternity. But along with this we must also come to realize that grace for the saved is the provision, from God, of all those things necessary to continue forward from the moment of regeneration. So when the Scriptures say,

*I can do all things through Christ
who gives me strength...Philippians 4:13*

they are really describing one aspect of grace that is available for the Christian, even though the word grace is not explicitly used! Why am I so certain of this? Because the Scriptures also say,

...apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Do you see it? We have not the strength to live the Christian Life, but Christ will provide, and that's what grace is! Consider II Peter 1:3:

*His divine power has given us everything we need
for life and godliness. . .*

God gives us everything we need! Once again this is a statement of the grace that is available for those who have trusted in Christ. In the context, this provision happens to be the over 7000 promises contained within the Word of God! We can't understand too well, or be reminded too often, of this marvelous topic of grace. Thus far, we have the principle that when a lost person gets saved, you have "seen" the grace of God. And we have a point of application that the saved have just as great a need for grace as do the lost. Let's add another principle to our collection:

**Grace is a descriptive term for the way God
deals with mankind.**

Grace is God's way of interacting with mankind, and we are going to have to spend time learning to understand, appreciate, and anticipate His grace because it is, for the most part, foreign to us. In most areas of life, work, sports, and academics, we labor away under a mindset that we earn what we get. Not so under grace. Perhaps considering the family for a moment will help us better grasp the difference between grace and merit. For, in a properly functioning family, children would know that they are loved apart from their performance or accomplishments. We may have observed parents who have made their acceptance "achievement-based," but we intuitively know something is wrong because that is not the way parental love is supposed to work. That's because the love of a parent for a child is to be gracious in nature.

So to be clear, as Christians, it is going to take a change of mind for us to look at things from a grace perspective. It is going to take time for us to come to grips with the fact that God accepts us in grace, and is going to make grace the basis of our ongoing relationship with Him. For you see, God has already provided everything we need for life and godliness (II Peter 1:3-4), and we don't deserve it, earn it, or work for it. Here is the reason:

*And if by grace, then it is no longer by works;
if it were, grace would no longer be grace. Romans 11:6*

Let me share with you a very simple yet powerful method of doing a self-check in order to see if you are thinking in terms of grace, or have fallen back into a system of legalism or self promotion. Consider the two terms: devotion and blessing. In God's plan, which is according to His grace, how are these two terms ordered? Which one comes first? Let's go all the way back to the Garden and ask, "Did God begin by blessing Adam and Eve with a perfect environment, each other, and everything else they needed, and then ask them to be devoted? Or did He ask them to prove their devotion before He provided such great blessing?"

Of course, the answer is obvious. He blessed them first, and then asked for devotion! How about the offer of salvation to lost mankind? Does God provide the blessing of salvation first, and then ask us to follow Him in devotion, or does He ask for devotion first and provide the blessing of salvation if the condition of devotion is met? I know there are those who teach devotion first, but that is to teach a works-based salvation. That is to teach that we earn or deserve our salvation and that is anathema to the text of Scripture!

As we have learned throughout our study of the book of Acts, God is calling us to turn to Him and believe. There are no works involved. If we will but trust in the person and work of Christ, He will bless us with eternal life (and many other things as well). Once we have that life, then and only then do the pages of Scripture sound a clear call for the one who is born again to follow in devotion. See Romans 12:1-2 for an example.

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,
that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy,
acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.
And do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,
that you may prove what is that good and acceptable
and perfect will of God.*

Be sure to note in this verse exactly who it is that is called to be a "living sacrifice." Let me be quick to add that the Christian's devoted following of his or her Lord and Savior is every bit as much dependent upon the gracious provision of God as was their initial salvation.



Listen to the wise words of W. Newell on this matter:

*To preach devotion first and blessing second,
is to reverse God's order and preach law, not grace.*

Do you see what he is saying? Devotion first, then blessing, is contrary to God's way of doing things. It is to turn our relationship with God from one of grace to one of legalism. Is this compatible with the plain statements of Scripture?

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith we have
peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have gained access by faith into
this grace in which we now stand. Romans 5:1-2*

Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is **standing** in grace—whether they know it or not! That is because God's way is a grace way, That's why Ephesians 1:3 says,

*...we have been given every spiritual blessing
in Christ in the heavenly realms.*

This is the proclamation of Paul to the Church in Ephesus. Although it is only the third verse of the book, already Paul can't help but bring up the grace of God as our starting point with Him. In fact, the outline of the book of Ephesians can be summarized as follows:

- Chapter 1-3: All that God has done, in grace, for the believer.
- Chapters 4-6. And not until Chapter 4 does Paul begin to lay out the demands of the Christian life for the final three chapters.

So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us not fall back into the error of devotion-first as the means of blessing, but understand that God has blessed us spiritually beyond anything we could earn or deserve. And therefore, let us pursue growing into that blessing as we follow after Him in a devotion engendered by grace!

Our Part in Salvation

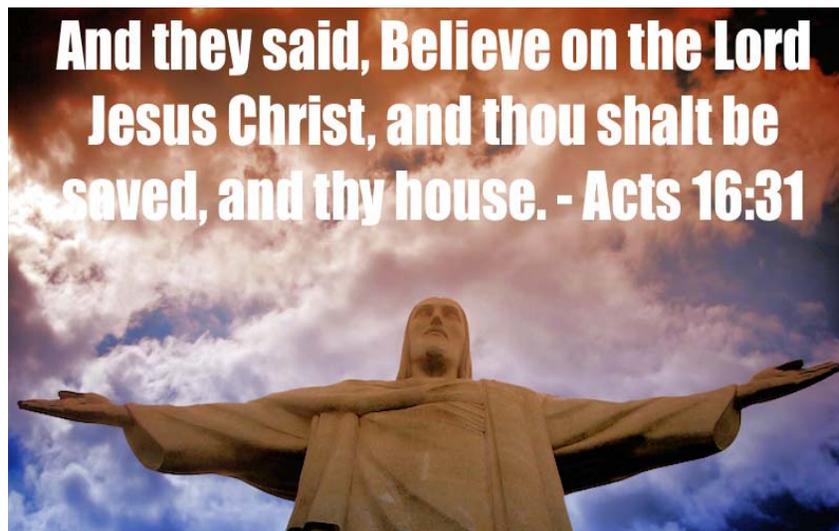
This leads us to another grace-related topic I would like us to settle. If we are saved by the grace of God, then what exactly is our part in salvation, if any? What responsibility do we have? Or let me ask this as directly as possible, "What does God want from man in response to the salvation He has, in grace, provided?"

Some will say: "Nothing!" They will go on to explain: God does not want, and man is incapable of, any kind of response, nor does he have any responsibility with respect to the salvation that God has provided. Now, if that truly was the case, how would the question of Acts 16:30 have to be answered?

Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

It would seem the answer would have to be, "You can't do anything!" However, that was not the answer given by Paul and Silas. Here is what they actually said:

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."



So maybe this is just an isolated case. What have we seen during our chapter-by-chapter study of the book of Acts? We have seen over and over something like, “. . . a great number believed and turned to God. . .” (Acts 11:21) It seems as clear as it could possibly be that the response that God is looking for to His provision of salvation is belief! In fact, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that this is the one and only thing that God wants us to do! (John 6:29, John 8:24, Galatians 3:22)

Now perhaps you are wondering why this matters. My answer would be that the book of Acts is not only meant to motivate us to fulfill the Great Commission, it is also revealing with a great deal of precision the content of the Gospel. Furthermore, it is driving home the simplicity of this content with abundant repetition. Why might this be important? All of our efforts at evangelism will come to naught if we don't have a clear Gospel message. We must not succumb to *muddying the waters* by adding bits and pieces to the message from our various backgrounds. Rather, we must discipline ourselves to go the Word of God, see what it says, and hold on to a pure Gospel.

Our Faith Response

So to this end, I would like us to take a look at a passage outside of the book of Acts that has both salvation and belief in view, and see what more we can learn about God's provision of salvation and the faith-response He expects from man. Consider a very well-known passage:

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. Ephesians 2:8-9

As you can see, both the topics of salvation and faith (belief) are clearly in view.

Now if we allow Acts Chapters 2-11 to help us interpret this passage, I think we will find it to be quite straightforward. We have learned that grace is seen whenever we see people getting saved, and this is exactly how Ephesians 2:8 begins:

For by grace are you saved. . .

And when the idea of “a gift of God” arises shortly thereafter, it would naturally refer to God’s provision of salvation for lost mankind. Gifts are not earned and gifts are compatible with grace.



When the Gospel was declared in Jerusalem, Samaria, Caesarea, Antioch, and all of the other cities in which the Word was proclaimed, we have had opportunity to note that the gift of God to lost mankind was clearly the salvation that was available in Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, teaching that faith is the gift would be totally foreign to the book of Acts. So you will be surprised to know that there is quite a persistent teaching within Christian circles that faith is the gift. You might be asking yourself, “Where does that come from?” The answer is based upon a certain logic that goes like this (notice I said logic and not Scripture): a person can’t be saved unless God gives them the gift of faith because we are fallen sinful creatures and therefore we are not capable of believing.

How do we respond to that? Although I agree that every person is born spiritually dead and under the curse of sin, I would also tell you upon the foundation of Scripture:

The gift of God is salvation for lost mankind, in which He has accomplished all of the work necessary to save each and every member of the human race who will turn to, and believe in, the Lord Jesus Christ. This salvation includes remission of our sin debt, the receipt of eternal life, the receipt of the very righteousness of Christ, union with Christ—in short, an infinity of blessing. If this is true, what is the response God is looking for? Faith! God is looking for belief in who Jesus is and what He has done for each one of us.

Let me provide the Scriptural documentation. Let's begin again with Ephesians 2:8-9:

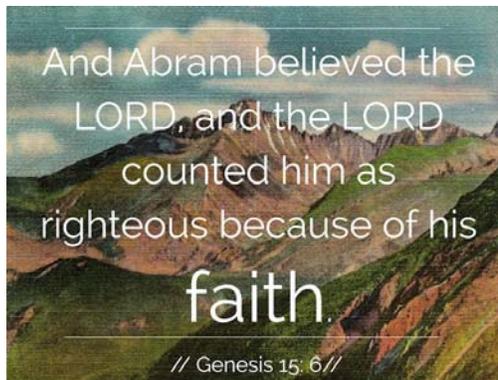
For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

In order to support the case that God has to give man faith, the above passage has to be interpreted such that the gift of God is not salvation, but faith. That certainly is discordant with what we have gleaned from Acts, but is it possible that faith is the gift? Grammatically, the Greek language makes it highly unlikely that the gift is faith, but naturally connects it to salvation. Furthermore, if we look at every form of the word "gift" that is used in the New Testament, we will find that the gift of God is said to be: eternal life (John 4:10), our justification (Romans 5:15), and Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 9:15). Notice that in no case is the Word gift ever associated with faith; but rather, in each case is associated with some aspect of salvation.

While we are at it, let's investigate "not of works." The Scriptures teach: justification is not of works (Romans 3-4), election is not of works (Romans 9), and our salvation is not of works (Titus 3). I know this is a lot to follow, but not only does the Greek grammar of Ephesians 2:8-9 preclude faith being the gift, but the point above shows you that the consistent message of the New Testament is that salvation is always seen as a gift, faith is never seen as a gift, and that works are never associated with salvation.

Let me show you two more passages of Scripture which will really drive this home. Romans Chapter 4 tells us:

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.



It then goes on to say:

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. . .
Romans 4:5-6

Whose faith was it? It was Abraham's and it is all those who follow him in faith. There is nothing in the text to make you think that the faith came from God. And then examine the following:

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. John 8:24

Does mankind have the capacity to respond to the call of God? Scripture clearly teaches that we do. Is Jesus telling them to do something that He clearly believes that they are capable of doing, or is He telling them they can't believe unless He gives them the faith? Don't you see that He is clearly challenging them to respond to Himself as the Messiah, and He would literally have to be mocking them if they couldn't really respond in the way in which He is challenging them to respond? Please note: no one would come unless God calls. In this case, God, in the person of Jesus Christ, certainly is calling. The Father, Son, and Spirit are all involved in calling the lost in our day. (John 6:44, 12:32, 16:8)

The point is for us to understand what response God expects. John 6:29 makes it very clear: "belief in the One whom He has sent." By this point you should be thinking to yourself,



"Why would some still teach faith is a gift despite these many clear evidences to the contrary?" The answer is that there is a theological system of thought that goes like this: man is fallen, and he is so *far gone* that he is not capable even of exercising faith in God's provision for salvation—Jesus Christ. I wouldn't be going into this if I didn't think there was something here very important for us to understand. You see, man most certainly is fallen and incapable of doing anything to save himself, or to contribute to his salvation. The Bible is very clear on this. But is faith a contribution? Is it a work? The Bible is equally clear that it is not, and that it is the one response that God is calling for man to make to the so-great salvation that He has wrought, and through grace, made available to man. That is why man is called to believe 99 times in the Gospel of John!

Look at how clear Paul makes this contrast between working for salvation and believing:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone..

Romans 9:30-32

You see faith is never considered a work. We see desperately needy and fallen man placing his faith in all kinds of things: money, possessions, religion. But what he needs to do is to turn from unworthy objects, at least as far as eternity goes, and turn to the One worthy object. For to say that fallen man cannot exercise faith is to misunderstand the nature of the fall.

Genesis 1:26 tells us that man was made in “the image and likeness” of God. So that begs the question: does none of this “image and likeness” remain following the sin of Adam and Eve? Is every aspect of it totally gone? The answer is all around us. Man’s works of genius in art, literature, science, engineering, technology, philanthropy bear daily testimony to the fact that mankind is distinctly different from the animal kingdom. These works bear witness to our connection with our Creator.

Our nature is not totally lost, but rather twisted. That is how an invention like the internet, which has made so much more information available including that for Bible study, has also been used to disseminate pornography on an immense scale. In short, if man can create it from the vestiges of what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God, his fall will also pervert or distort what he has made. So then, what you should realize is that it is precisely because we are made in the image and likeness of God, that we have the capacity to exercise faith.

We cannot do any work to earn our salvation, but we most certainly can believe. We can place our trust in what God has done for us. And that is the response God is looking for. Look closely at John 3:36:

*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life;
and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life,
but the wrath of God abides on him.*

No person will end up in hell because God didn't give that person the faith to believe. Rather, a person will end up in hell because he or she refused to respond to the salvation that God worked for us and in His grace offers to those



who will believe. Perhaps you are thinking, why is all of this important?

First of all, it is important because eternity is at stake. And there are those who think they are *in* the kingdom of heaven, who are going to hear, "Away from Me I never knew you."

Second, it is essential that we don't confuse entry into the Christian life, with living the Christian life. If we do, we are likely to put an obstacle in front of a lost person which they cannot get over without resorting to trying to earn their salvation by works. So it is imperative that we have things clear in our own thinking, that we might sound the "clear trumpet call" of a pure Gospel to our families and neighbors.

For these reasons, we have hit the truth pretty hard that salvation is by grace because that means God has provided everything we need apart from any merit or devotion on our part. To be sure, devotion is to follow, but make no mistake about it, true devotion is only possible by the grace of God.

What then is our role? Our only role in salvation is to believe! And there is no merit in that exercise of faith. All the merit is in the object of that faith—Jesus Christ. Look how clearly this is portrayed in the well-known hymn:

*'Tis so sweet to TRUST IN JESUS,
Just to take Him at His Word,
Just to rest upon His promise,
Just to know: "THUS SAITH THE LORD!"*

Look how clearly this is also portrayed in this well-known scripture, John 6:28-29:

Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

And, the one God sent was the One answering their questions—Jesus Christ.

There are those who claim you need to seek faith, in fact, you should beg God for it. Then there are those who reject some saying they just don't have the right kind of faith. What do we say, as a fellowship bearing witness to the Gospel of Christ? Who can come? Everyone who will believe! How do we come? By choosing to believe the Gospel! We make a choice, as creatures made in the image and likeness of God, to believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Our Responsibility

This potential to be saved is what motivates us to share the good news. So, if you are a child of God, then I trust you are appropriating the grace of God daily. You are manifesting the character of Christ and the fruits of the Spirit so that those watching would see the grace of God manifest through you and be attracted to it. Won't you trust Him!

And if you are not yet certain of your eternal destiny, or do not know if you have eternal life, then take God up on His provision of the blessing of salvation apart from any works on your part. For He has done a perfect work and is even now calling to you to turn to Him and put your faith in Him because:

.. so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:14-15



Then, as His grace provides, you too can walk in devotion to Him, and, in doing so, taste the abundant life. What a glorious thing it would be to see the grace of God today as one more lost person is saved, through faith, out of the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. His is the work, ours but to receive the gift of salvation

through faith.

Postscript

Somewhere in the process of writing this booklet I received an interesting question from within the congregation that makes a perfect postscript to this message. The question went something like this: "I see your point that we see the grace of God whenever a lost person gets saved; but what exactly should I expect to see when this happens?"

I like the question because, on the one hand, I would never have thought to address it on my own, and, on the other hand, it shows me that people are thinking about this deeply. This thinking, in turn, leads to questions to which they would like to know the answers. So let me try to briefly answer as best I can.

In summary of this booklet, we “see” the grace of God whenever a lost person gets saved, because no member of the human race can ever be good enough or do enough to earn or deserve eternal salvation. Rather, they are saved when they receive the gift of salvation that God has worked through His Son, Jesus Christ, and made available to anyone who will receive that gift through faith in the person and work of Christ.

So back to the question at hand, what would it look like when such faith is exercised? I think the best way to answer this is to consider two perspectives—God and man’s.

God’s Perspective

Let’s start with God’s perspective, what would He see? The short answer is the heart! Consider what Peter says in Acts 15:7:

. . .by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe.

So far, this is completely consistent with the plan of salvation we have come to appreciate. But now read on to what comes next:

So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Acts 15:8-9

Not surprisingly, God knows when a person has believed, when a person is close to believing, and when a person has rejected the Gospel. Furthermore, it is not anything outward that He sees, but faith expressed from the heart—the heart being part of the soul of man. When God sees this faith response on the part of any man, all sorts of things happen. For one, those who are saved receive the Holy Spirit and their hearts are purified. If we include other Scripture as well, we can add that they are regenerated, indwelt by the Spirit, sealed by the Spirit, given eternal life. In fact, they are given every spiritual blessing in Christ.

So what I am wanting you to realize is that God sees in absolutes. He knows when a person has believed, and acts accordingly. Can we see the heart in the same way? No we cannot!

Man's Perspective

So what then would we expect to see from our perspective—the perspective of man? If we consider the two items from Acts 15, can we physically see the giving of the Spirit or a purified heart? No, but we certainly might be able to see the results of a transformed life. So what we see is not in the realm of the absolute, but outward signs of an inward change. We can look for things like:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
Acts 2:42

It might also *look like* some dramatic changes in lifestyle:

A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. Acts 19:19

It might even look like extraordinary love among the believers. (John 13:35).

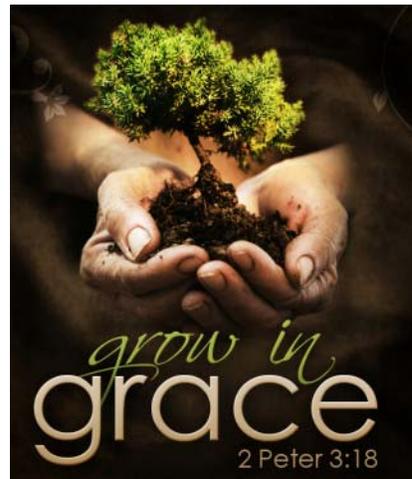
A Caution and Applications

At this point I caution you, for there are two mistakes we can make. Does an outward manifestation, like pouring all one's alcohol down the drain, a modern equivalent of burning your scrolls, guarantee that an inward change has occurred? Judas modified his life to follow after the Lord and yet there was no inward regeneration. To complicate matters further, if you were watching Ananias and Saphira or Simon the Sorcerer, you would observe some things that would make you question whether or not there had been an inward change. And yet Scripture gives us every reason to believe there had been change.

So let me conclude with two points of application:

- Ultimately, only God knows the heart. What we observe can give us an idea of what is going on in the inside; but ultimately, one's eternal destiny is between each person and the Lord.
- Every new believer is in a very precarious situation. Although their eternal destiny is settled, the world is trying to pull them back into its clutches. That is because Satan loves to take Christians out of the spiritual battle.

If this question I have been trying to answer does anything, it should cause us to realize how important it is to try and draw new Christians into the fellowship. They need to engage in those things that will promote their spiritual growth and bear visible witness to the new creatures they have become.



VISTOSO
Community  Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit... *John 15:5*

1200 E. Rancho Vistoso Blvd., Oro Valley, AZ 85755 ☎ 520 825-0652

Bible references in this booklet are taken from the New King James Version
(NKJV) or the 1984 New International Version (NIV)