

By Grace Alone

A Bible Study



Introduction

“What must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:30)? The question was asked by a jailor in the city of Philippi who, a moment earlier, was about to take his life. Because God “has set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 3:11), the jailor understood that there is an afterlife; his conscience, roused by the near-death experience, told him he wasn’t ready for it. He pleaded, “What must I do to be saved?”

All humankind, either with the lips or in the secret heart, has asked the same question. Praise God that he has not kept the answer a mystery. We are saved by God’s grace alone.

The necessity of grace

No one can truly understand the grace of God and salvation by God’s grace alone unless he first understands original sin and the total depravity of every member of the human race.

Romans 5:12,18: *“Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...the result of the one trespass was condemnation for all men.”*

- What happened to the entire human race when Adam, the representative of the human race, fell into sin?

John 3:6 *Flesh give birth to flesh.*

Ephesians 2:1 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

Romans 8:7,8 *The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*

Matthew 15:19 *Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.*

- What is a further result of Adam’s fall into sin? How is this exhibited in people’s lives?

Romans 3:10-12 *There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

Romans 3:23 *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Romans 6:23 *The wages of sin is death.*

- To whom do the above verses apply?
- Mark (X) the statements that accurately reflect the truths that Paul is asserting in the above verses.

- All people have inherited a spiritual weakness.
- Although sinful, people are nonetheless able to seek and find the true God.
- By nature, all people are totally depraved and corrupt.
- No one has any righteousness whatsoever before God.
- There are degrees of spiritual corruption and depravity.
- People by nature are not able to offer a thing to God that would earn his favor.
- All people have earned (and are able to earn) nothing but God's eternal hatred and condemnation.
- God would be perfectly fair and just in sending all of us to hell.

James 2:10 *Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

Isaiah 64:6 *All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*

Romans 3:20 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

- Respond to someone who contends, "In spite of their natural spiritual corruption, many people today are able to live a mostly decent life that lines up with God's commandments. God knows and sees this and takes it into consideration."

Born in sin and totally depraved by nature, we are unable to save ourselves or even to contribute somehow to our salvation. Furthermore, there is nothing in us that would prompt God to forgive and save us. Left to ourselves, we and all mankind stand hopelessly condemned.

Saved by grace alone, or not at all

People can do nothing at all to save themselves and have nothing to offer toward their salvation. Yet, the world has been saved. It has been saved by God's grace alone.

Isaiah 43:24,25 *But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses. I even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.*

- Where is God's motive for blotting out the sins of fallen mankind found?

Exodus 34:6,7 *The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.*

Ephesians 2:8,9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*

- What quality in God has prompted him to forgive and save us and all fallen mankind?

2 Corinthians 5:21 *God made (Christ Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Acts 4:12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

- How did God, moved by his grace alone, demonstrate his grace and bring about mankind's salvation?
- Explain: One who trusts in God's grace alone for salvation yet rejects the vicarious work of Christ cannot be saved.
- God's grace is undeserved, unearned, unprompted by man, and in Christ alone. Use the following Bible verses to identify further attributes of God's grace.

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.*

God's grace extends to all people; it is _____.

John 19:30 *Jesus said, "It is finished."*

God's grace provided everything that was necessary for our salvation; it is certain and _____.

Romans 3:22-24 *There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

God's saving grace is an unconditional and _____ gift.

Romans 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*

God's saving grace is offered and conveyed through the _____, the good news of God's grace that is _____ in accomplishing God's purpose.

John 3:36 *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.*

We receive the benefits of God's saving grace through Spirit-worked _____.

Acts 7:51 *You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!*

Even though God's power is in his gospel message of grace, grace can be _____.

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

Galatians 5:4 *You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*

- Agree or disagree. In the above verses, Paul is saying that salvation is by grace alone or not at all.

Grace is a quality in God. It is his undeserved and unmerited favor and kindly disposition toward fallen mankind by which he independently and apart from man freely forgives sinful mankind because of the redemptive work of Christ the Savior alone. Any claim or attempt to merit or contribute to salvation destroys salvation by grace.

Rejecting grace

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by God's grace alone. Yet there is something in the natural heart of every person that rejects this message of unequalled comfort. Theologians call it the *opinio legis* – the faulty religion ingrained in our sinful nature that believes we can save ourselves (or, at the very least, contribute somehow to our salvation) by what we do or don't do. The gospel of salvation by God's grace alone is utter foolishness and an offense to the proud, sinful nature in all of us.

Luke 15:18,19 *Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.*

- Briefly review Jesus' parable of the lost son. The runaway boy, humbled and repentant, made the decision to return home. How did he hope and intend to regain his father's favor? What led him to this idea?

Luke 15:20 While (the lost son) was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

- What details in the parable indicate that it was impossible for the lost son to regain the father's favorable disposition?

Luke 15:29-31 (The older brother) answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends." "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours."

- Agree or disagree. Since the father in Jesus' parable represents the heavenly Father, Jesus is teaching that even those who live under the Father's roof may nonetheless be lost.
- Which good works in our own lives may be a special temptation leading us to think that we have earned God's favor and, in so thinking, to deny God's grace?

Because the slightest injection of man's works or worthiness contaminates and destroys the truth of salvation by God's grace alone, Satan loves this false doctrine. Sadly, he has slithered into the realm of the Christian church with this teaching and has found receptive ears.

- Briefly respond to each of the following statements made by Christian churches today. We believe that salvation is by grace. Grace is not something in God, but it is a gift from God – a quality that God infuses into the soul of a person by which that person can do good and obtain forgiveness.

We believe that salvation is by grace. We understand that if one is to receive God's saving grace, he must make the decision to do so; he must invite Jesus into his life. There must be mental and intellectual assent to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We believe that salvation is by grace. We believe that grace will and must be experienced through human emotions and inner stirrings that may or may not manifest themselves outwardly, as through miraculous healings or speaking in tongues. Religious experiences and feelings are the seal and guarantee of God's saving grace.

We believe that salvation is by grace. We understand that those who have been saved by grace will obediently submit to Jesus and his will for their lives. The sincere effort of the Christian to reform and to live a Christ-like life makes God's grace in one's life real.

We believe that salvation is by grace. We believe that preaching about damning sin and the total depravity of people is counterproductive to the message of grace.

- What makes the above statements so appealing and therefore so dangerous?
- Even the most subtle denial of salvation by grace alone will lead to one of two places: self-righteousness and pride or uncertainty and despair. Explain.
- There is a relationship between grace on the one hand, and good works, assent, religious feelings and the effort to be more Christ-like on the other. What is it?

The proud, natural heart is deeply offended by and rejects the truth that salvation is by God's grace alone. Satan, too, hates this truth that saves and has worked his way into the Christian church to contaminate it to the destruction of immortal souls. Christians must remain ever vigilant.

Conclusion

The jailor asked, "What must I do to be saved?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" was the reply. In essence, Paul and Silas were saying, "Nothing. There is nothing you can do to be saved. Not only are you incapable of doing anything, but it's already been done, and you cannot do or finish what has already been completed. For it is by grace you have been saved."

Cherish and guard this saving truth. Live each day in the certainty of your salvation. It is God's work from start to finish. It is done. It is by grace alone, and that is more than enough.