

## Works Of Faith (Part One)

by Staff

***Forerunner, "Ready Answer," September-October 1999***

The church of God has taught that God's grace does not abolish His law. The issue is not "law or grace" but "law and grace," for the grace of God does not grant us license to transgress His law. God's spiritual law coexists with His grace. Even that He blesses us with His law is an act of His grace! David prayed, "Grant me your law graciously" (Psalm 119:29).

We also know that faith does not replace our doing good works. Works do not save us, but are required nevertheless as evidence of our faith. The issue is not "works or faith" but "works and faith," since "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20, 26). If "faith without works" is useless, then surely "faith with works" must have a use!

We can be tempted, however, to believe that works ended and faith began with Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection. Some may think that, with the beginning of the New Testament era, Christ in us, through the Holy Spirit, keeps the law in our stead. They believe that it is self-righteous to try to keep the Ten Commandments to ensure salvation. They feel that working to keep God's law takes credit away from Him for our salvation and that these works are just so many "filthy rags" in His sight. Are we guilty of not submitting to God's righteousness, His spirit and faith, if we try to keep His law?

A good way to gain a better perspective of "works and faith," as well as "law and grace," is to understand God's definition of righteousness. He reckons some people as righteous and others He does not. He has *never* changed His standard of righteousness, which "endures forever" (Psalm 111:3). God imputes righteousness to those who believe Him—who do what He commands, who yearn to keep all His commandments, who have faith.

Paul records that the carnal Israelites established their own righteousness (Romans 10:3), because they decided what laws they would keep and how, instead of following God's definition of righteousness. They thought this kind of righteousness—really self-righteousness—would force God to give them salvation. These works, though, are vain, self-serving and faithless.

The Bible leaves us little room for negotiation about what God expects of us during our walk with Him. In Matthew 19:16-17, a man asks Jesus, "'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, ' . . . [I]f you want to enter into life, ***keep the commandments*** .'" Jesus tells him he must do something, not just believe, to gain salvation. By this, He also tells us what works He expects of us, if we would live forever with God.

### **Coworkers With Christ**

We must do good works to be blessed with eternal life, and all who have eternal life do such works. Our Savior expects us to become coworkers with Him in our salvation, as well as the salvation of all mankind. Paul writes, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

It is a tragic error to believe that we need to perform no works in our salvation, that Jesus will keep the law for us through the Holy Spirit. It is true and noteworthy that He kept God's law in our stead His entire life. He kept it with all His being, and because He faithfully did so, our Father in heaven accepted His great sacrifice for us.

What a blessing that Jesus remained faithful to His Father's great law! Those good works enabled Jesus to pay the death penalty each of us incurred, because all of us have transgressed God's law of love. As a direct result of His faithfulness in this, He reconciled to His Father those who believe that they also must work the same kind of good works!

The purpose of this reconciliation and of God's grace is to get us to quit transgressing His law. He wants us to stop doing bad works and begin doing good works—to quit practicing selfishness and start practicing godly love. It is time to discern that, not only did He die to make it possible for us to have eternal life, but also to give us the opportunity to "live for righteousness" (I Peter 2:24). This expression means "to live by God's law," because "all Your commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172). He pleads with us even now, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

### **The Law is the Way**

God's great law is His way of life! God chooses to live by the Ten Commandments, and they reveal His excellent character. To enter His Family, we also must live by God's law, which helps us to develop godly character. This is how closely eternal life is linked to keeping the commandments.

*Can* we keep God's law in the letter and the spirit? God does not ask of us what we cannot do—and he can who thinks he can! Some say this sounds like "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps." Consider that if we trample on God's law, as Paul explains in Hebrews 10:28-29, we are telling God that we despise His grace! Grace does not replace God's law of love; God extends it to sinners who promise to sin no more! Not keeping the Ten Commandments is therefore an insult to God's grace. To keep the Ten Commandments wholeheartedly, though, requires tremendous effort because of the downward pulls of the world, the self and Satan.

The Bible reveals how we can keep God's spiritual law. Paul instructs Timothy, "[T]he Holy Scriptures . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus . . . thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:15, 17). In His Word, God lays out how to motivate us and help us believe that we can keep His law.

How many Christians believe Romans 1:16? "[T]he gospel of Christ . . . is *the power of God to salvation* for everyone who believes." Jesus thunders in Mark 12:15, "Repent, and believe in the gospel." The gospel must be important. First, we must repent—quit our sinful ways and keep God's ways. Second, we must believe the gospel—that He is reproducing Himself by bringing many others with holy, righteous character like His own into His Kingdom. This much the called of God must do on their own power.

We repent and believe in Christ as a prerequisite to being saved by the faith *of* Christ—by His faith placed within us. The conditions of turning from sin and accepting Christ (including baptism) we

must do ourselves, but these do not save us. They merely reconcile us to God—bring us in contact with Him, so that He can then give us His Holy Spirit. His Spirit contains the gift of faith that saves us. This faith of Christ will not transgress God's law.

How does God inject His Spirit, so necessary for salvation, into a repentant sinner? Since "the gospel . . . is the power of God to salvation" if we believe it, God employs agents to preach His true gospel in a deceived world. "[I]t pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (I Corinthians 1:21). God saves people through preaching His message to them.

How does He do this? Jesus says, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). The words He speaks to us are His Father's loving will for us, life-giving spiritual food, if we will accept it! The words preached—if they come from God—will inspire us if we heed them.

Paul adds more detail to this process. God "supplies the Spirit to you . . . by the hearing of faith" (Galatians 3:2, 5). Can we believe the Bible? We receive God's Holy Spirit through the believing ear.

Receiving His Spirit is a matter of eternal survival for us because, unless we have the Spirit of God, God will never accept us into His Family. Everyone who has the Spirit of God lives by the law of God because that is how God lives! By this spirit from God, we learn to keep His law flawlessly and forever! Thus, receiving the Holy Spirit is not the aim of our salvation but learning to live God's way is! The law tells us how to do this.

The true gospel is packed with compelling power to open our minds to God's way of thinking, to His attitude, to His Spirit. By it, God teaches us to think His thoughts—but only if we believe it! God uses the attractive power of His message to call us, to regenerate us with His Spirit and to save us. Notice:

- » "God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel" (II Thessalonians 2:13-14).
- » "[A]fter you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, . . . you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). "[I]n Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (I Corinthians 4:15).
- » "I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, . . . by which also you are saved if you hold fast that word which I preached to you" (I Corinthians 15:1-2).

Is this saving ourselves by our own bootstraps? No! Through His gospel Christ transfers to us the faith He had when He walked on this earth. This gospel is not about the person of Jesus—it is the gospel about God's plan to reproduce Himself through millions of people being changed and inheriting His Kingdom!

But Christ can do this successfully—even within His own church—only if the hearers decide to believe Him and the message He received from the Father.

### **Receiving God's Gifts**

If we believe Him, we accept Jesus' faith—it is a matter of cause and effect, guaranteed by God. Subsequently, we receive the Spirit of God by hearing this faith preached (Galatians 3:2), but only if we have a receptive attitude. With this Spirit in us, we will make every effort to keep God's law.

Acts 8 describes how Simon Magus desired God's Spirit but hated God's law. Why do some clamor for the gift of the Holy Spirit, but not for the gift of God's law? It is because they do not understand that God's Spirit is the spirit of His law! His law is love, and His Spirit is one of outgoing concern.

Most people, even in God's church, beg God to *give* them the thing that He pleads with them to *receive*. They focus on "getting"; they have "the gimmies." They want what they think is God's Spirit but on their terms. God wants to give to those whom He calls, but do we really want to receive what He has to give? Like selfish, spoiled children, we pray for His Spirit but do not prepare to receive it: Repent and believe the gospel! We cannot receive God's Spirit if we continue to fulfill the lusts of our heart. God gives "the Holy Spirit . . . to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

We can learn to honor God's spiritual law of love more by thinking of it as His *way of life*. Herbert Armstrong equated God's law with His "way of give." We have His word that He will not cease to live this way because His law is eternal and will never change: "All His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Psalm 111:7-8). As we daily replenish our mind with Christ's thoughts from His Word, allowing His mind to be in us, we can keep the Ten Commandments in truth and uprightness, and with the same attitude that He kept them. In this way, we can learn to fulfill the law as Jesus did (Matthew 5:17).

God's goal is to bring all of us to the point where we cooperate with Him in our salvation. He throws us the life-preserver, as it were, but we will drown unless we actively take hold and hang on with all our might. He has called us to be coworkers with Christ in our salvation, as Philippians 2:12-13 shows:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed [God], not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [our part], for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure [His part].