

Scriptural Response for Catholics: Gospel of Works vs. Gospel of Grace

1. Catholics have a less than Biblical view of salvation. The Bible says that we are saved by God's grace, in Christ alone, through faith alone. It is *His* grace, *His* life, *His* death. Jesus the sum and substance—our full and final payment.

In Roman Catholicism, the stain of original sin is removed at baptism. A mortal sin kills the relationship with God. A venial sin breaks the relationship with God. You need the sacraments to maintain a relationship with God. The sacraments according to Roman Catholics restore the relationship with God. You might be saved, but you are kept by adherence to and submission to Catholicism. What does the Bible say?

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast [Eph. 2:8–9].

These are the great verses that consummate this section on the believer's past, present, and future. We were dead in trespasses and sin, God saved us by His grace, raising us now to heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and we will someday be in heaven displaying the grace of God. None of this depends on our own works or merit, "for by grace ye have been saved." Notice I have changed it to the literal phrase "*the* grace." The article points out that it is something special. The great emphasis is upon the grace of God. It is favor bestowed on the unworthy and undeserving.

Now don't come along and say, "I hope to be saved." If you have put your trust in Christ, you can say, "I *am* saved." Someone may say, "Oh, I wouldn't dare make a statement like that because I don't know what the future holds." Friend, your salvation rests upon the *grace* of God—not upon your faithfulness. You can be confident of this very thing, "... that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). If you are a child of God, you may wander from Him, but He will always make a way back for you because it is by His grace and that alone that you are saved. You have a finished salvation. On the basis of what Christ has done for you and on the fact that the Holy Spirit has inclined you toward Christ and you have believed the Word of God and have trusted Him, you can say, "I am saved" It's not an "I hope so" salvation or an "I'll try" salvation. It is a salvation that is by the grace of God, by means of faith, and it is not of yourself. It is a gift of God.

The grace of God has been defined theologically as "unmerited favor." I like to speak of it as "love in action." Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the man who taught me theology, made this important statement about God's grace and God's love in his book, *The Ephesian Letter, Doctrinally Considered*.

A sharp distinction is properly drawn between the compassionate love of God for sinners, and His grace which is now offered to them in Jesus Christ. Divine love and divine grace are not one and the same. God might love sinners with an unutterable compassion and yet, because of the demands of outraged divine justice and holiness, be unable to rescue them from a righteous doom. However, as has been before stated, if love shall graciously provide for the sinner all that outraged justice and holiness could ever demand, the love of God would then be free to act without restraint in behalf of those for whom the perfect substitutionary sacrifice was made. This is Christ's achievement on the cross. On the other hand, divine grace in salvation is the unrestrained compassion of God acting toward the sinner on the basis of that freedom already

secured through the righteous judgment against sin—secured by Christ in His sacrificial death. Divine love might desire to save, yet be unable righteously to do so; but divine grace is free to act since Christ has died. It is to be observed, then, that the eternal purpose of God is not the manifestation of His *love* alone, though His love and His mercy are, like His grace, mentioned in this context and expressed in Christ's death; but it is rather the manifestation of His grace. Out of God's infinite treasure chest He lavishes His grace upon sinners without restraint or hindrance.

Now faith is the instrumental cause of salvation. It is the only element that the sinner brings to the great transaction of salvation. Yet it too is the gift of God. I know someone will say to me, "Since faith is the gift of God and God hasn't given it to me, then I guess I'm not to blame if I don't believe." The answer is this: God has made it very clear that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. If you want to trust Christ, you will have to listen to the Word of God. God will give faith to all who give heed to the message of the gospel.

We find this taught in 2 Corinthians. Moses had a veil over his face, not because he was blinding everybody like a headlight, but so that the people could not view the glory that was fading away. It was the glory that belonged to the Mosaic system and that belonged to the Law. "But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ" (2 Cor. 3:14). There is no need for a veil today because He is the unveiled Christ; the gospel is freely declared. But we are told, "But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away" (2 Cor. 3:15–16). What is "it"? It is the heart. When the heart shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Anytime that you are ready to turn to Christ, you can turn to Christ.

Someone else objects, "Maybe I'm not given the gift of faith." That's not your problem. Your problem is that you don't want to give up your sins which the Bible condemns. Whenever you get sick of your sins, when you want to turn from yourself, from the things of the world, from religion, from everything the Bible condemns, and turn to Christ, then you will be given faith. You can trust Him.

I am weary of hearing folk say they don't believe because they have intellectual problems. Actually they have moral rather than intellectual problems if only they would face up to them. Sin is the real problem in the hearts of a great many folk today. Even many of the saints don't enjoy their salvation for that very reason. Psychologists at Duke University made a study and found that the second most frequent reason people are emotionally disturbed and mentally unstable is because they live in the past. They are preoccupied with past mistakes and failures, and they look to themselves instead of looking to Christ and trusting Him.

Faith is that instrument of salvation. Spurgeon says, "It is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not thy hope in Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not even thy faith in Christ, though that be the instrument; it is Christ's blood and merit." That is where the power is, and that is where the salvation is.

Paul is not talking about *faith* when he says, "And that not of yourselves." He is talking about *salvation*. Salvation is a gift that eliminates boasting. It is all of God and not of us. It is God's *gift*.

2:8 faith, and that not of yourselves. “That” refers to the entire previous statement of salvation, not only the grace but the faith. Although men are required to believe for salvation, even that faith is part of the gift of God which saves and cannot be exercised by one’s own power. God’s grace is preeminent in every aspect of salvation (cf. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16).

2:10 created in ... for good works. Good works cannot produce salvation but are subsequent and resultant God-empowered fruits and evidences of it (cf. John 15:8; Phil. 2:12, 13; 2 Tim. 3:17; Titus 2:14; James 2:16–26). **which God prepared beforehand.** Like his salvation, a believer’s sanctification and good works were ordained before time began (*see notes on Rom. 8:29, 30*).

2

2. Does the church have the power to call Jesus down to be sacrificed all over again?

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost [John 19:28–30].

John carefully shows us that Scripture is being fulfilled. There are chapters in the Old Testament which are especially concerned with the Crucifixion. I would list Psalm 22, Genesis 22, Isaiah 53, and Leviticus 16. There are twenty-eight prophecies fulfilled while He was hanging on the cross. “I thirst” is the fulfillment of Psalm 69:21.

“It is finished!” What was finished? Your redemption and my redemption was finished. In His report to the Father He had said, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).

3

19:30 "It is finished!" The verb here carries the idea of fulfilling one’s task and, in religious contexts, has the idea of fulfilling one’s religious obligations (see 17:4). The entire work of redemption had been brought to completion. The single Gr. word here (translated “it is finished”) has been found in the papyri being placed on receipts for taxes meaning “paid in full” (see Col. 3:13, 14). **He gave up His spirit.** The sentence signaled that Jesus “handed over” His spirit as an act of His will. No one took his life from Him, for He voluntarily and willingly gave it up (see 10:17, 18).⁴

3. Are we saved by sacraments and attending church or in Jesus alone?

¹McGee, J. Vernon: *Thru the Bible Commentary*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981, S. 5:236-237

²MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. Eph 2:8

³McGee, J. Vernon: *Thru the Bible Commentary*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981, S. 4:493

Gr. Greek

⁴MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. Jn 19:30

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved [Acts 4:12].

Go back to the birth of Jesus and the instruction of the angel: "... thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He is the Savior. That was His name at the beginning. When you accept the name, you accept all that it implies in the person who is involved. Peter makes it clear, and I want to emphasize that when you come to Him, my friend, you come to Him for salvation. There is no other name under heaven that can save you. The law can't save you. Religion can't save you. A ceremony can't save you. One alone, the name of Jesus, can save you. Jesus is the name of that Person who came down to this earth to save His people from their sins. When any person comes to Him in faith, that person is saved. There is no other place to turn for salvation.

Isn't it interesting that in the long history of this world and all the religions of the world and all the dogmatism that these religions have, not one of them can offer a sure salvation? An uncle of mine was a preacher in a certain church which believes in baptismal regeneration; that is, that you must be baptized to be saved. I asked him this question, "Look, if I get baptized as you say, will that guarantee my salvation?" "No," he said, "it couldn't quite do that." My friend, may I say something to you today? There is none other name under heaven whereby you can be saved. If you come to Him, if you trust Christ, then you are saved. That guarantees your salvation.

5

4:12 no other name. This refers to the exclusivism of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. There are only two religious paths: the broad way of works salvation leading to eternal death, and the narrow way of faith in Jesus, leading to eternal life (Matt. 7:13, 14; cf. John 10:7, 8; 14:6). Sadly, the Sanhedrin and its followers were on the first path.⁶

4. Can we know that we are saved?

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God [1 John 5:13].

John has a twofold purpose in writing this epistle: (1) "that ye may *believe* on the name of the Son of God"—that's salvation, and (2) "that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life"—if you have Christ, if you have believed Him, you have life. A great many people say, "I just want to believe that I have eternal life." The question is: Whom do you believe? Not *what* do you believe, but *whom* do you believe? Do you believe God? Do you believe the record that He gave? He says that if you have the Son, you have life. Now do you believe that? John didn't say if you feel like it or if you have joined something,

⁵McGee, J. Vernon: *Thru the Bible Commentary*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981, S. 4:527-528

⁶MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. Ac 4:12

but if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. And if you have Him, then you have life.

This is the reason John has written this epistle—“that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” This was also the purpose of the gospel which John wrote: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written [John didn’t write everything, just certain things], that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God [that’s who He is]; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30–31).

If you have the Son, you have life—John wants you to know that, and you honor God when you know it. That simply means that you are not making God a liar, but you’re trusting Him. It is not a matter of how much faith you have or how you feel about it, it is whether or not you trust Christ. That’s all important.

Having this assurance of eternal life will do something for our Christian life here and now—

7

5:13–21 John concludes his letter with a discussion regarding 5 Christian certainties that constitute a powerful climax to the entire epistle. He accentuates their certainty by using the word “know” 7 times in this section.

5:13 These things. This has reference to all that John has written in his letter. **that you may know that you have eternal life.** Assurance of eternal life constitutes the first Christian certainty. While John wrote his gospel to bring unbelievers to faith (John 20:31), he wrote the epistle to give believers confidence that they possessed eternal life. The false brethren’s departure left John’s congregations shaken (2:19). He assured those who remained that since they adhered to the fundamentals of the faith (a proper view of Christ, obedience, love), their salvation was sure. **eternal life.** This does not refer primarily to a period of time but a person (v. 20; John 17:3). Eternal life is a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ and possessing His nature (as in vv. 11,12).

8

5. Where does our faith come from? From the Eucharist or the Word of God?

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God [Rom. 10:17].

Oh, this is so important! Faith does not come by preaching philosophy or psychology or some political nostrum; it comes by preaching the *Word of God*. Until you hear the Word of God, you cannot be saved, my friend.

9

⁷McGee, J. Vernon: *Thru the Bible Commentary*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981, S. 5:818-819

⁸MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. 1 Jn 5:13

⁹McGee, J. Vernon: *Thru the Bible Commentary*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981, S. 4:720

10:17 faith ... by hearing. See note on vv. 14, 15. **the word of God.** The preferred rendering is “the word of Christ,” which means “the message about Christ”—the gospel (cf. Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 20:21).¹⁰

6. Is God revealed in sacraments or in the word of God?

And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation [1 Sam. 2:1].

A “horn” speaks of strength, something to hold on to. Hannah says “her strength,” but she means her strength in the Lord. She is rejoicing over the fact that God has given her a son. She is victorious over those who ridiculed her for being barren, and she is rejoicing in her salvation. There has been a present deliverance. Salvation comes in three tenses. (1) *We have been saved.* “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath [right now] everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). That means that God has delivered us from the guilt of sin by the death of Christ. That is *justification*, and it is past tense. (2) God has also delivered us from what the old theologians called “the pollution of sin,” which is present deliverance. *We are being saved.* It is a deliverance from the weaknesses of the flesh, the sins of the flesh, the faults of the mind, and the actions of the will. This is the present deliverance that Hannah is talking about. It is *sanctification* and is in the present tense. (3) Finally there is the deliverance from death in the future—not physical, but spiritual death. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). This is a future deliverance. *We shall be saved.* That will be *glorification*, which is future tense. We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Hannah was rejoicing in her salvation.

You remember that Jonah said, “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9). The psalmist repeats again and again that salvation is of the Lord. The great truth of salvation is that it is by the grace of God. That is, we have been justified freely by His grace. The word *freely* means “without a cause.” God found nothing in us to merit salvation. He found the explanation in Himself—He loves us.

11

2:1–10 In contrast to the prayer that came from her bitterness (1:10), Hannah prayed from joy in these verses. The prominent idea in Hannah’s prayer is that the Lord is a righteous judge. He had brought down the proud (Peninnah) and exalted the humble (Hannah). The prayer has four sections: 1) Hannah prays to the Lord for His salvation (vv. 1, 2); 2) Hannah warned the proud of the Lord’s humbling (vv. 3–8d); 3) Hannah affirmed the Lord’s faithful care for His saints (vv. 8e–9b); 4) Hannah petitioned the Lord to judge the world and to prosper His anointed king (vv. 10d–e). This prayer has a

¹⁰MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. Ro 10:17

¹¹McGee, J. Vernon: *Thru the Bible Commentary*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981, S. 2:125-126

number of striking verbal similarities with David's song of 2 Sam. 22:2–51: “horn” (2:1; 22:3), “rock” (2:2; 22:2, 3), salvation/deliverance (2:1, 2; 22:2, 3), grave/ Sheol (2:6; 22:6), “thunder” (2:10; 22:14), “king” (2:10; 22:51), and “anointed” (2:10; 22:51).¹²

¹²MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. 1 Sa 2:1