

# Grace and Obedience

by Robert H. Boll

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*Our salvation is by faith alone, and faith alone, and it is by faith that we lay hold of God's free gift of grace.*

**Scripture:** Romans 16:25

**Topics:** "Divine Revelation", "Christian Stewardship"

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## Description

The preacher delves into the concept of 'mystery' in the New Testament, explaining that it refers to truths previously unknown but now revealed by divine revelation. In the context of the Greek Mystery Religions, a mystery was a secret rite administered to the initiated. However, in Scripture, 'mystery' signifies truths hidden from human reason but made known by God. The sermon emphasizes that believers are stewards of God's mysteries, responsible for handling them with reverence and integrity.

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## Transcript

In discussing the distinction between Law and Grace, and Grace and Works, we are in danger in reacting against extreme positions, of being carried to an opposite extreme. We are prone in our teaching to stress man's part, and the "conditions of salvation" just because we have seen that ignored and denied in the religious world about us. But we are in peril now of stressing those neglected features of God's truth until there is no longer any difference (in principle) between our preaching and the teaching of the Law, which Moses summed up in the words, "He that doeth the righteousness which is of the law shall live thereby" (Rom. 10:5)--a principle essentially opposed to salvation by faith. ( Gal.3: 12. ) In that sort of teaching the perfect freeness of the grace of God and the full, free forgiveness and salvation are lost sight of; and the consequent love, joy, and peace are lost. We may come to think that salvation is a sort of fifty-fifty proposition; that we do our part and then it is up to God to do His. That position is fatal to spiritual life. The principle so adopted pursues us with its curse throughout our days. We begin to feel that our hope depends wholly and always on how well we come across with "our part"; and our part is of course the requirement of the Christian life--a requirement that grows and becomes more impossible as we strive to perform it. Duties multiply; our sense of failure and condemnation increases. Under its burden some of us drop down and decide we will just "do the best we can," and go along hoping for the best, but down in our hearts expecting the worst. Some give up entirely. Some make great efforts and swing back and forth between self-exaltation and despair. None are happy. All this is due to fundamental misconception of the gospel. It is well worth our while to look into the matter.

If Christianity is but another law, are we not doomed to begin with? For if it is only a new law that we have--why, the old was all-sufficient for ministry of death and condemnation. The law was holy and righteous and good; and therefore worked wrath. For the law is spiritual; but we are carnal, sold under sin. What use have we for another law, and one even stricter than the one we had? The old law brought men into a spirit of bondage unto fear--what better thing have we under the more exacting responsibility of the Gospel? Here we need a knowledge of the distinctive features of the gospel-- the grace of God.

What then is grace? It is favor from God. Its essential point lies in this, that it is free, undeserved, unmerited favor. God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5); hence justification is by grace. If a man were (or could be) justified by law, his justification would be because of his worthiness, and a matter of just due. Grace could not enter into that. The man who would attempt to be justified on such a plan makes void and abandons the grace of God as the ground of his salvation (Gal. 2:21). The same is true of meritorious works. [2] The man who would be saved on the grounds of his good works cannot be saved by grace. "To him that worketh the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt." That would exclude grace. For if it is by works it is no longer by grace; otherwise grace is no more grace." (Rom.4:4; 11:6.) To the extent that the salvation is obtained by works it is not of grace and cannot be. God never mingles the two principles. When the king found a servant who owed him ten thousand talents, he proceeded against him according to law. But when the servant appealed for mercy, the king freely forgave him the whole debt. He did not let him work and pay off what he could of the debt, and then forgive him the rest. God never does that kind of thing; He holds you to everything and if He forgives at all, He forgives you all, freely. You may count on that and take your choice.

It becomes evident at once that if we are saved by grace at all we are saved by grace only--not by grace plus something else, but only by grace. Otherwise it would not be by grace at all. There maybe (and indeed there is) something we must do to apprehend that grace. It is impossible to bestow a free gift upon a man unless he takes it; and if there is a God-appointed way to take it, thus must it be taken. But that it is merely the acceptance, and contributes nothing toward the gift, nor does it pay for it or produce it. The things a man may have to do in order to receive a gift of God's grace do not rank alongside with the grace as a procuring cause of the gift. It would be a great mistake to class those things as so, and would come very near making grace void. Our salvation is either wholly and only and exclusively by grace, or not by grace at all. If we compensate Him in any wise for our salvation by anything we give or do, it is no longer His free gift of grace. And God will have nothing of the sort.

If then we are asked what it is that God demands of the sinner the answer is, simply, faith. The reason God demands just that and nothing else is that faith is the one, only thing that is non-meritorious. "Therefore it is of faith that it may be by grace" (Rom.4:16). "By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that (that salvation) not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works that no man should glory" (Eph.2:8,9). By this we see clearly that what is by faith is also of grace. Faith affords no grounds for boasting. For faith is reliance upon another. It is in very nature a giving up, a surrender and submission, a looking to another for help. When I put my faith in a guide I acknowledge thereby my inability to direct my own way, and my entire dependence on the guide. When I put my faith in a physician, it is the expression of my need and helplessness. To the extent that my faith is whole-hearted and unreserved, I abstain from all self-effort, and yield myself entirely to the helper I trust in. So is our faith in Christ. It is set in contrast with any and all attempt to attain to salvation by means of our own works and effort. "Now to him that worketh the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt; but to him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" ( Rom. 4:4, 5).

[3] But it is just as obvious that in every case faith will do something. That is the essence of faith. If I have faith in a guide, I will unquestioningly follow him. I will not try to make a way or find a way myself. Where he leads me I will follow. If I trust in a doctor, I submit to his direction, take his medicine, I obey his orders. I do not try to cure myself; I leave it to him. These illustrations may fall short, but they do illustrate. If I believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, my Lord and Savior, I give up myself and whatever I know or have--my wisdom, my righteousness, my power, in fact, myself. He alone has made the perfect atonement for me; only He can cleanse me from sin, can make me a new creature, can sustain me can save me. For all this I look to Him and to Him alone. The ground of my faith is that He is God's Salvation, God's Beloved Son who died for me and rose again, and is able to save me to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Therefore I obey Him implicitly. It is by such a faith that I am saved. And it is by faith that it may be grace. (Rom. 4:16).

Again it must be clear that when it is said that we are saved by faith, it means that we are saved only by faith. If faith does something (as it always will and must, if it be true faith) that does not alter the matter: it is still faith and only faith that saves us, faith that works, it is true, but simply faith, not faith plus something else, some other thing which is not faith, super-added, but faith, purely and only. The things that faith does, (the acts of obedience of faith) are not to be co-ordinated with faith, and ranked alongside faith in the same category, as if we were saved by faith plus something else added besides. We are not saved by faith plus repentance, plus confession, plus baptism; but by faith--a faith that repents, confesses, leads to baptism, but just that faith, that sort of faith, and nothing else. It is a grave mistake to rank the steps of faith alongside with faith, as equal and joint cause of salvation. These things are not coordinate with faith: but sub-ordinate to it. They come out of faith if that faith be real. If one should reply that Christ says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"--that is a mode of expression parallel with "love God and keep His commandments." It does not mean two different things, but one thing: "for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments." For the true love of God alone can keep His commandments; and any obedience divorced from the love of God is not to be thought of. So faith always obeys implicitly, because it is faith, and if it did not obey it would be shown to be defective, or not faith at all. It is the true faith that saves, and though it involves the obedience, it is still only faith.

Examples of saving faith and its manifestations in obedience are many. By faith Noah wrought to build the ark to the saving of his house. By faith Israel in Egypt sprinkled the blood on the doorposts; and the angel passing over saw not only the blood but also the faith that put it there. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days. Those walls fell by faith; and they fell by grace--for wherever faith is there grace operates; and where these are there is no room for man's boasting: all the glory is the Lord's. In the New Testament the blind man of [4] John 9 must indeed go to Siloam and wash; otherwise he shall never receive his sight. Yet it is not by virtue of his own act, nor by the water of the pool of Siloam that his eyes were opened, but the power and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus also it is not the act of baptism (as though that were anything in itself) but by the grace and power of the Lord Jesus, and through faith, that the baptized one has remission of sins.

It is supremely needful to stress that which really constitutes our salvation; the cross of Christ, the love which at infinite cost provided the salvation; the perfect freeness of the grace; and that it is by simple faith that we lay hold of all God's gift. Otherwise our proud hearts will forever plume themselves on what we have done. For the natural tendency of our perverted minds is to glory in works and to trust in what we have done or are doing, as though it were by something of our own will-power and goodness that we had attained to salvation. We are nothing--only lost souls, dead in trespasses and sins. We can do

nothing--only flee to Jesus and rely helplessly on Him. As for the baptism--it is in no sense a work: it can barely be called an act. God would not let man baptize himself, lest he might think he had done something. Another must baptize him; he can but yield himself to be buried and raised. It is not by any efficacy of the water, or by the sacramental virtue of a rite or ceremony, but purely as His appointed expression of faith that baptism is at all valid with God. But this is valid and indispensable.

As we are saved by grace, so do we stand in grace, all our Christian life through. (Rom. 5:2.) We are established in a new relationship with God. As law could not justify, so neither can it sanctify. We are no longer under bondage again unto fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father, (Rom. 8:15.) Sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under law but under grace. And His grace is always sufficient for us, for His strength is made perfect in weakness, that the glory and praise may be His. Out of that root alone springs the true Christian life, its love and joy and peace and hope, its good works ("faith working through love") and perfect confidence and eternal good comfort (2 Thess. 2:16)--that according as it is written--"he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord."

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