

Call to Obedience #482
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Salvation and Works

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For by grace you have been 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).

I believe these verses are two of the most frequently-quoted scriptures and have become the doctrinal foundation of many denominations and institutions. The claim is made loud and clear and over and over again that salvation has nothing to do with works.

Well, before I address this issue, let me take you with me into the world of aviation to glean some lessons from there to help us with these Bible verses. I well remember the day when an FAA flight inspector took the right seat in my airplane and we were on our way for an instrument flight assessment to see if I would earn a license to fly on instruments. After flying in the clouds in the Chicago O'Hare controlled airspace for a while, we broke out for the landing. A very strong, gusty crosswind had developed and it would take all I had to safely land. The tower gave me the landing clearance and I immediately rattled it back to the tower as I was trained to do. At that moment the flight inspector furiously yelled at me at the top of his voice, saying: "Fly the airplane. Is that your grandmother in the tower? Fly the airplane." What he was saying is this: "On a challenging landing like this, forget about the tower and forget about your grandma and everything else. Fly the airplane. Nothing is ever more important than that you fly the airplane." The key to flying the airplane is to keep the wings level, and watch your altitude and airspeed. I am glad the FAA inspector yelled at me. This lesson has saved my life over and over again. Flying the airplane is what I did when I picked up icing, when I faced a UFO coming straight at me, when I had an electrical failure, when the engine began to stumble, and when I noticed two fighter jets appearing beside me, one on each of my wingtips. My key responsibility was to fly the airplane.

Following is an accident that occurred because the pilots forgot to fly the airplane. In 1972, Eastern Air Lines Flight 401 was on the approach into Miami, Florida. One instrument associated with the landing gear began to malfunction. The copilot was trying to figure out what was wrong and soon the

captain joined him to resolve the issue. Very quickly, they developed a severe case of fixation. They were so focused on one small detail that neither one of them was flying the airplane. Inadvertently, the autopilot had been turned off and it was nighttime. The airplane was in a slow descent and crashed into the alligator-infested swamps of the Everglades resulting in the death of 101 people.

Do you know where I am going with this? Most people have a problem with fixation—they stop “flying the airplane”—when it comes to Ephesians 2:8-9. Fixation on these two verses has killed more people, spiritually speaking, than any other passage of scripture that I know of. It has produced millions of unprofitable servants who will perish forever. There are other “flight instrument” passages in the Bible other than Ephesians 2:8-9 that you need to look at. For example, look at the next verse. It begins with the Greek word, “gar” (for), assigning purpose: *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Eph. 2:10). Reading verses 8, 9 and 10 together, you get clarity on the subject of salvation and works. You are saved to go to work for Jesus and work the assignments that He gives you. These assignments, as a whole, are not made up as you go along, but they have been prepared and blueprinted for you before the foundation of the world. If you are not in the work that God has assigned to you, you are likely to have a life without His anointing.

Again, **you are not saved by works but for works.** You do not need works to get started, but you need to get busy with God’s assigned works in order to enter into the joy of the Lord and finish as a profitable servant. Also, before you were saved, all of your righteousness and works were as filthy rags. But now your works are righteous and most precious: *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13). Starting is not finishing. Salvation is not a one-minute process which is then finished. **Salvation is a life given to God and a life lived for God.** Here are some of the most definitive scriptures on this subject from the three judgment parables of Matthew 25 which prove that you need something to show for the life you lived when you come to the end of your journey.

1. The Parable of the 10 Virgins

They all were virgins, meaning they all were washed by the blood of the Lamb. With their purity, they all had light which was given to them by God. It was His gift, but it was their job (work) to keep the lights burning. But five of them only retained the light for a season and then their lights went out due to

carelessness and distractions. When the bridegroom came for the wedding, they had nothing to show Him. **The fact that they once had light did not count.** No, Jesus shut the door on them and said: *...I do not know you* (Matt. 25:12). They were unprofitable servants. They were lost forever. You need to keep your light shining all the time.

2. The Parable of the Talents

One servant received five talents, one received two talents and one received one talent. They were all His servants, that is children of God. The one who received one talent did not go to work to multiply that talent, to be fruitful for Jesus. **He was His servant, but he was rejected** because he was an unprofitable servant and therefore he was cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. You are not saved *by* works but *for* works. God wants more than a moment from you—He wants a life from you.

3. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

How does Jesus judge who should go to heaven or to hell? Is Christ's judgment based on an experience people had with Him at some time in the past? No! Is it based on their believing that Jesus is their Savior? No! What Jesus is looking for is works: have you fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoners, did you take in strangers? Yes, it is faith that Jesus is looking for, **a faith that goes to work in and out of love.** As you can notice from these judgment parables, Jesus explains the faith/works subject from three different angles to make sure that we understand it.

Let me give you one other scripture relating to this, that has taken many people to death in an alligator swamp. Again, fixation problems lead to crashes. It says in John 10:28 that once you are saved, nobody can pluck you out of Jesus' hand. People rely on that verse to assert that their salvation is secure forever, no matter what. That is the text, but pay careful attention to the verse that is just before it: *My sheep hear My voice... and they follow Me* (John 10:27). The promise of eternal security is only for those who hear Jesus' voice and follow Him. As long as you are a follower of Jesus you are safe.

Never, never, never get fixated on one scripture. Every scripture has a context. Read the verses above it and below it. Then see how it fits into the whole Bible. Spiritually speaking that is the way you keep your wings level, and keep your altitude and airspeed.

But there is another lesson from flying. You have to check the airplane before you leave the ground. It is called a pre-flight check. You walk around

your airplane and perform an external inspection to see if the airplane is air worthy. Then you go inside and start the engine and do a check list of all the instruments: flight instruments, the engine instruments and you check your radios. Your airplane must pass all the checks. The most important flight instrument is called the attitude indicator. With one quick look, this instrument tells you whether your wings are level and whether you are ascending or descending.

There is also a place for an attitude check before you receive the gift of salvation to see if you are worthy of it. Yes, you are saved by faith, it is a gift of God. But what is your faith? Is it saving faith or is it a selfish faith that you just want to get saved in order to obtain your insurance policy to go to heaven without a willingness to take up your cross and follow Jesus? Not all faith is saving faith. Saving faith arises out of a broken and a contrite heart, and being thirsty after the things of God: *Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price* (Is. 55:1). Can you see that the gift is for the thirsty. If you are not thirsting, you will not drink. And if you do not drink, you will perish.

This message can be summarized by the following words spoken by Jesus: *Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven* (Matt. 7:21). We are not saved *by* works but *for* works. For more articles, visit my new website: www.joyfulabiding.com

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