

Pursuing God—A Seeker’s Guide

Chapter Ten *Trying or Trusting?*

1. You are about to read an explanation of the concept of faith in Christ. You must listen and think carefully. Many have misunderstood salvation due to wrong ideas about this issue. Please read chapter ten aloud.

2. At the beginning of the chapter I quoted only part of a clarifying verse, Ephesians 2:8-9. Let me give you the whole verse now:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Paul is talking to people that have already become Christians. He is telling them *how* they came to Him—by faith and not by works. Why do you think God rejects the “works” way of salvation?

3. The Bible teaches that justification is through faith. Justification means that the believer is declared righteous before a holy God, even though he is sinful, on the basis of Christ and what He has done. He comes to God in Christ’s righteousness which is given to him as a gift. That may seem confusing at first. Let me state it again. To be received by God, you must have righteousness. You don’t have that in yourself because you are sinful. Yet Christ gives you His righteous which is received by faith. Clothed in His righteousness, you are accepted by God. So, you are declared righteous with the righteousness of someone other than yourself. Does this make sense? Please take a few moments to discuss this until you understand it clearly.

4. I also quoted a passage about Abraham. Let me give you the fuller quotation now. It is found in Romans 4:1-5.

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”* Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. . .

Now, to understand this passage, answer these questions: Why was Abraham’s “righteousness” not acceptable to God? Will there be any people who boast in heaven? If not, why not? What is the plain teaching of this passage about how we are justified?

5. Paul is adamant about this truth—that is, that faith in Christ is the only way to be accepted by God. In one place Paul says this:

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. (Galatians 2:21)

Either a person tries to come to Christ by the law (that is, by trying to do what God says to do and not do what God says not to do—by trying to earn salvation by his or her works), or through faith. Law and works go together and grace and faith go together, as we learned from the previous verses. You either trust yourself to have the works of obedience that will make you acceptable to God, or you place your trust in Christ and receive salvation as a gift of grace. One is the impossible way, and the other is the possible way. What does “set aside the grace of God” mean? And what does it mean: “Christ died in vain”?

6. Do you think I’m too strong when I say that trying to be a Christian is an insult to God and is a way of despising what Christ has done on the cross? Are there no good works that God accepts to help you be saved?

7. Now, let me take a moment to discuss this important idea: Whose right is it to determine which way is acceptable for salvation? I hope the answer is easy for you to figure out. The answer is, of course, God. It is His prerogative to determine the way of salvation for any person. He made us, we have sinned against Him and deserve nothing but hell, and He alone can give us forgiveness and eternal salvation. God alone has the right to determine which way is the right way to be saved. So why do so many people believe they have a better idea? That is, why would so many disregard God’s way and prefer their own way?

8. Some people are very actively pursuing the wrong way of salvation. It is hard to convince them to consider something else. Hear what Paul said, for instance, about the moralistic Jews. (The problem can be in Gentiles as well as Jews, of course). Paul longed for them to see the right way of salvation.

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:1-4)

In what way did the Jews disregard God’s way of obtaining righteousness which is through faith or belief in Christ? How is it possible to be so active and excited about the wrong thing? Do you think this is happening among any people you know? Is it possible for a whole church to have the wrong ideas about salvation? If so, do you think those groups ought to be called “Christian churches?” Whatever your answer, certainly there should be a sadness, like Paul had for the Jews, when we think of groups of professing Christians who do not understand grace and faith, but persist in the law/works view of salvation.

9. This has been a pivotal chapter for you and any person who is seeking to be sure that he or she is a true Christian. In this last moment, please discuss anything that is not clear. Don't hesitate to ask any related questions. Understanding faith and justification is essential.

For next week: Please read the final chapter carefully.