

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 this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may 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. One of the reasons why our salvation cannot be obtained by our own works is found in Romans 3:10-12. Read these verses aloud together. What do these verses say about man's ability to impress God with his own kind of righteousness?

4. I also quoted a passage about Abraham who lived before the Old Testament Law was given. Let me give you the fuller quotation now. It is found in Romans 4:1-5.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather 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 counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who

does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...

Now, to understand this passage, answer these questions: Why were Abraham's works 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 nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Galatians 2:21)

Either a person tries to come to Christ by the law (that is, by doing ceremonies or by any kind of mere rule-keeping), 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 that will make you acceptable to God, or you place your trust in Christ and receive salvation as a gift of grace—a gift that will produce corresponding works. One is the impossible way, and the other is the possible way. What does “nullify the grace of God” mean in the verse above? And what does it mean: “Christ died for no purpose”?

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.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 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.