

The Free Gift of God is Eternal Life  
Dr. Steven R. Cook

The gospel is the good news that addresses the bad news of human sinfulness and separation from a holy God. Despite our helplessness and deserving of eternal punishment, God's solution is the gospel of grace, which reveals Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself, died, was buried, and resurrected on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness required, and pardons the sinner as His love desires. Salvation from eternal damnation is a free gift offered to all who trust in Christ alone, which emphasizes God's infinite grace rather than our human effort. This ultimate gift, paid for by Jesus's sacrifice, underscores the Bible's message that "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23), highlighting God's generosity and the completeness of Christ's work on the cross.

### God is Holy

The Bible reveals God is holy. God declares of Himself, "I am holy" (Lev 11:44), the psalmist says, "holy is the LORD our God" (Psa 99:9), and the Seraphim declare, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts" (Isa 6:3). In her prayer, Hannah said, "There is no one holy like the LORD" (1 Sam 2:2). In these verses, the word "holy" translates the Hebrew word *qadōsh* (קָדוֹשׁ), which, according to James Swanson, refers "to being unique and pure in the sense of superior moral qualities."<sup>1</sup> God's holiness is closely linked with His righteousness, justice, and perfection. Holiness denotes moral purity. J. Carl Laney states, "When we say 'God is holy,' we mean He is totally separated from all that is unholy, defiling, or contrary to His nature. God's holiness is unique and distinctive in that it is without any contamination or impurity."<sup>2</sup> Because God is absolutely holy, it is written, "no evil dwells with You" (Psa 5:4), "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor" (Hab 1:13), and "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Evil is any thought, word, or act that is contrary to the character and will of God. According to Merrill F. Unger, moral evil "is the failure of rational and free beings to conform in character and conduct to the will of God."<sup>3</sup> George Howley states, "God is separate from all evil and is in no way responsible for it...[and] It can only be attributed to the abuse of free-will on the part of created beings, angelic and

---

<sup>1</sup> James Swanson, "קָדוֹשׁ", *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>2</sup> J. Carl Laney Jr., eds. Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, "God is Holy", *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 188.

<sup>3</sup> Merrill Frederick Unger, "Evil" *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 382.

human.”<sup>4</sup> Evil originates in the heart (Gen 6:5; Zech 8:17), is part of our nature (Matt 7:11), and results in evil actions (Neh 13:17; Prov 24:8; 1 Pet 3:12).<sup>5</sup> According to Scripture, “the LORD is righteous and He loves righteousness” (Psa 11:7). There is a time when “He is coming to judge the earth; and He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness” (Psa 96:13), and He will “judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1).

## **Everyone is a Sinner**

Sin is the failure to conform to God’s perfect righteousness. Scripture reveals we are sinners “in Adam” (Rom 5:12-13; 1 Cor 15:21-22), sinners by nature (Psa 51:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 7:14-25; 13:12-14), sinners by choice (Eccl 7:20; Isa 59:2; Jam 1:14-15; 1 John 1:8, 10), born as “sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2), and are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). The Bible reveals “there is no one who does not sin” (1 Ki 8:46), and “there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins” (Eccl 7:20). Isaiah wrote, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa 53:6a). Paul stated that we “are all under sin” (Rom 3:9), and “there is none righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10), for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). James wrote, “we all stumble in many ways” (Jam 3:2a), and John declared, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10). This means everyone stands guilty before God.

## **Good Works Do Not Save**

Good works have no saving merit before God. Isaiah wrote, “all of us have become like one who is unclean, and **all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment**” (Isa 64:6a). Paul wrote, “a man is **not justified by the works of the Law** but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since **by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified**” (Gal 2:16), for “by grace you have been saved through faith; and that **not of yourselves**, it is the gift of God; **not as a result of works**, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9), and God “saved us and called us with a holy calling, **not according to our works**” (2 Tim 1:9), and “He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness**” (Tit 3:5a). Though human good works may have value in the sight of other people, they have absolutely no saving merit in God’s sight. None at all!

---

<sup>4</sup> George Howley, “Evil,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 349.

<sup>5</sup> To be evil means we conform ourselves to Satan’s world-system (1 John 2:15-16), and that we, by default, are self-centered and not God-centered. To be righteous means we are conformed to God’s character and will, both in a salvific and sanctified way.

## The Solution of the Cross

We are helpless to save ourselves, but God made a way, and this because He loves us and desires our salvation. He loves us so much that He sent His Son into the world to pay the sin debt we cannot pay. We're told, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10). Nearly 2,000 years ago, God the Father sent God the Son into the world to take upon Himself humanity (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:30-35; John 1:1; 14; Heb 10:5), to be free from sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5) and to live a perfectly righteous life. Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38; cf., John 7:29; 8:29; Gal 4:4). Jesus was sent by the Father to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), for "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus willingly went to the cross and paid our sin-debt (John 10:18). His death was a penal substitutionary sacrifice for us, as the Son of Man came "**to give His life a ransom for many**" (Mark 10:45). Paul wrote, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us**" (Rom 5:8). Peter said, "**Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust**, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). His death on the cross was for all sins for all time, for "the death that He died, He died to sin once for all" (Rom 6:10), He "offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (Heb 10:12), and "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Because of Jesus' death on the cross, God "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col 2:14). There's nothing for us to add to Jesus' work on the cross. Having paid our sin debt in full on the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), and then He died.

After Jesus died for our sins, He was buried in a grave, and raised on the third day, as Scripture reveals (1 Cor 15:3-4). And "Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again" (Rom 6:9). After Jesus's resurrection, He was seen alive by hundreds of people (1 Cor 15:5-8), and those eye witnesses provided a written record of what they saw and heard (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; 2 Pet 1:16-18). God's offer of salvation is available for everyone. The Bible speaks of "God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:3b-4), who has brought "salvation to all men" (Tit 2:11), and is "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9).

The cross is God's righteous solution to the problem of sin, as well as His greatest display of love toward sinners. At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness required, and pardons the sinner as His love desires. To understand the cross of Christ is to understand the heart of God toward a fallen world He wants to save. If someone perishes eternally, it is because they failed to respond to God and His drawing them to Himself (John 3:18; 5:39-40; Acts 7:51). All who end up in the lake of fire are there by personal choice, not because God failed to love them or make provision for their eternal salvation.

Once we hear the good news about what Christ accomplished for us, we are asked to place our faith in Him, to "Believe in the Lord Jesus" for salvation (Acts 16:31). Jesus is the object of our faith. To believe in Christ as our Savior means we trust Him to accomplish for us what we cannot accomplish ourselves: eternal salvation from the lake of fire. Faith in Christ is the only condition for salvation. Faith does not save. Christ saves. Faith is merely the instrument by which we receive the gift of God. Only the empty hand of faith accepts the gift. It offers nothing, but is open to receive that which is offered by another. No payment is required by us to receive it. Christ alone saves. No one else can save us, including ourselves.

### Salvation is a Free Gift from God

Salvation is a gift from the Lord. It is the most precious gift ever offered. And though the gift was very expensive to God, it is absolutely free to us. The precious gift of our salvation was paid in full by the Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins, who hung between heaven and earth and paid our sin-debt. According to God's Word, "**the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**" (Rom 6:23). The words "free gift" translate the Greek noun *charisma* (χάρισμα) which, according to BDAG, refers to "that which is freely and graciously given, favor bestowed, gift."<sup>6</sup> And Joseph Thayer defines it as "a gift of grace; a favor which one receives without any merit of his own."<sup>7</sup> Paul, when writing to the Christians at Ephesus, said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9; cf., Rom 4:4-5; Tit 3:5). To say we are saved by grace means our salvation is unearned and undeserved in any way. God's gift of salvation is totally apart from any good works we may produce, and since good works do not save, bad works cannot unsave (though they can bring divine discipline). A gift focuses on the graciousness of the giver, whereas a reward focuses on the work of the recipient. Salvation

---

<sup>6</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1081.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 667.

is NOT a reward for work we've accomplished; rather, it is a free gift from God and based totally on the finished work of Christ. We pay nothing. Jesus paid it all.

The realization that salvation is offered freely, based solely on the perfect work of Jesus on the cross, offers profound relief to the person who has been laboring under the yoke of a works-based system. Those who operate under a works-based system of salvation will never reach a place of certainty in their relationship with God, for they will never know whether they have done enough to gain entrance into heaven. But the truth that salvation is a grace-gift from God, received by faith alone, liberates those who accept it. When properly grasped, God's gospel of grace alleviates the pressure to perform and the fear of falling short and brings a deep sense of peace and joy, knowing our salvation is secure, not because of our own efforts, but because of Christ's finished work. Peace comes when we look to Christ and the promises of Scripture and not ourselves. This gospel of grace message transforms our relationship with God from one of fear and striving to one of gratitude and love, as the focus moves from what we must do to what Christ has already done on our behalf. This grace-based approach encourages us to live out our faith from a place of thankfulness rather than obligation, resulting in a more authentic and joyful Christian life.

### **The Benefits of the Cross**

At the moment of faith in Christ, the benefits of the cross are applied to us. Scripture reveals we are forgiven all our sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), given "eternal life" (John 5:24; 10:28; Rom 6:23), the "gift of righteousness" (Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9), have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1), become "children of God" (John 1:12; Gal 3:26), are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24), are "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13), and are blessed "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 1:3). Furthermore, as Christians, we are among those "whose names are in the book of life" (Phil 4:3). As a result, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). We will never experience the lake of fire. Never. As Christians, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

### **Good Works Should Follow Salvation**

To be eternally saved, the only condition is faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 4:14; 16:31). That's all. Once saved and justified in God's sight, the Lord expects us to submit to Him in total obedience in all areas of life (Matt 28:20; Rom 12:1-2; Jam 4:7), and to learn His Word in order to live His will in every particular (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2).

After salvation-justification, the Lord directs us to begin a lifelong journey of faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38; 11:6), and to “press on to maturity” (Heb 6:1). This glorifies God, edifies others, and results in the best life possible in this world. Good works is what God expects of His people. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Paul wrote, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10). The Lord instructs us “to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit 2:12) and to be “zealous for good deeds” (Tit 2:14). We agree with Paul who wrote, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal 6:10). God clearly calls His people to a life of obedience and good works. There is no question about this. The Scriptures are plain on the matter, instructing us, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior” (1 Pet 1:15). It is never the will of God that we sin; however, when we sin (and there is no Christian who does not sin), it is always His will that we handle it biblically by means of confession (1 John 1:9), which always results in forgiveness and restoration of fellowship. If we fail to walk in regular obedience to the Lord, we are subject to divine discipline in time (Heb 12:5-11), and loss of rewards in eternity (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 John 1:8). Though believers may turn from the Lord and pursue a life of sin, these will also experience divine punishment, even to the point of physical death (1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16-17), but will not forfeit their salvation, which is not possible (John 10:28).

In summary, salvation is free. The Lord Jesus purchased it for us on the cross, and He offers it without cost to those who place their trust in Him. It is freely offered and freely received, and there’s nothing for us to pay. That’s grace. Our justification before God is a one-and-done event that happens at the moment of faith in Christ. Good works are not a prerequisite, corequisite, or postrequisite to salvation. That is, beyond simple faith in Christ, nothing is required of us before, during, or after we believe in Him as our Savior. We are saved by grace alone (we don’t deserve it), through faith alone (not by works), in Christ alone. Good works should follow salvation (Eph 2:10; Gal 6:10), but they are never the condition of it.

Once saved, God calls us to a lifelong process of sanctification. Sanctification is the life we live after being justified, and this process continues until we leave this world, either by death or rapture. The sanctified life requires us to learn and live God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18), walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38), be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16), and make ongoing good choices to stay on the path of God’s will.

