

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

***The Least of These:
Ministering to Those in Need***
Lesson 10: Living the Gospel

After nearly two millennia since Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, there are still depths of truth in it that we all have yet to penetrate fully. In our memory text we read the exactly-right formula of salvation—we are saved “not of works” but “by grace ... *through* faith, and that not of [ourselves]; it is the gift of God” (2:8). When we say that we are “saved through faith” we don’t want to give the impression (or have the idea) that our own exercise of faith is the cause or the means of our salvation. No one in the hereafter will boast, “Yes, the Lord saved me, but I did my part: I did the work required, I believed—that’s why I’m here. I helped save myself.” Utterly wholehearted thanks will pour out of our souls for all time and eternity. (To believe is not a work!)

“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” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Here we have the classic, inspired formula that forever ends all controversy and confusion! Paul, no angel could have said it more plainly! You have cleared up all the controversy that has raged through the centuries about “faith and works.”

It may be popular to say “we are saved by faith,” but that is not the precisely accurate definition: rather, “by *grace* you have been saved.” Faith is not far away: the grace operates “*through faith*.” The latter is only the appreciation of the former.

When and where was the saving grace revealed? *At the cross*. This means, of course, that the blessed truth of the pure Good News of Ephesians says that it is easier to be saved at last, than to be lost—if only we appreciate how that grace is revealed—in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“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).

The more we read, the more obvious the truth becomes: the “good works” are not inventions of our own; God “prepared” them “beforehand.” They are “prepared” in the same way that ripe, delicious peaches were “prepared beforehand” before you even planted your peach tree. In the vast creation of God, the spiritual fruit of a converted heart is grander than the Lord’s most magnificent physical creations. The Greek word rendered “prepared” is *poiema*, from which we derive our word “poem.” Think of a beautiful poem—how was it “created”? From someone’s gifted mind, or heart.

One of the gospel truths of the 1888 message is that it is actually easy to be saved and hard to be lost if one understands and believes how good the Good News is. The only difficult thing is learning how to believe the gospel. Jesus taught this truth.

Eternal life is promised to everyone who “believes” in Jesus: “If anyone keeps My word He shall never see death,” He said (John 8:51). “He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life” (5:24).

But what does it mean to “believe” in Him? The Bible warns us of a massive counterfeit of “believing” in these last days (Matt. 24:23, 24, for example):

Genuine believing has to do with the Father *giving* His Son for the world: “God so loved the world that He *gave* ...” (John 3:16). He *gave*, not *lent* Him. That means a totality of giving and an eternity in its duration. It also means an appreciation of His dying for us because the only way we can “believe” is by seeing Him “lifted up” as Moses “lifted up” a snake on a pole “in the wilderness” (vss. 14, 15). That directs us to the kind of death that Jesus died—on a cross (12:32, 33).

Therefore, “believing” in Jesus means a heart-appreciation of the Father’s giving Him and of Christ’s giving Himself in dying for us our “second death” which we had earned for ourselves (cf. Heb. 2:9, Rev. 2:11). Such “believing” transforms the believer. It is a genuine new birth because the love of self is “crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20).

Genuine believing in Jesus means therefore that there is a well of “rivers of living water” springing up from within the depths of the heart of every true “believer” in Him (John 7:37, 38). That’s what it means to believe in Jesus! You are a channel through which that “water of life” flows to thirsty people. We must ask seriously, Do I truly “believe” in Him? Lord, help my unbelief!

The last book of the Bible is clear: the only news God has for anyone at any time is Good News. The final message in Revelation 14 is “the everlasting gospel,” which never means Bad News.

In the final proclamation, “the everlasting gospel” in the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, the Holy Spirit will be poured out in such fullness that He will convict people in the highest echelons of world leadership. Some are motivated to step out fearlessly and identify with the despised “remnant” who “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (cf. Rev. 15:2, 3; 12:17). The gospel commission will not be finished with a whimper but with a blaze of glory.

The “everlasting gospel” is such Good News that we sinful human beings have a difficult time believing how good it is. In fact, when Jesus tells us that His “yoke is easy and [His] burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30), He is trying to tell us that our main problem is learning how to believe.

Ancient Israel could not enter their Promised Land because of unbelief (Heb. 3:18, 19; 4:6, 7). And Jesus speaks to all of us when He told the distraught father of the devil-possessed child, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). A few minutes later, He had to tell the disciples why they couldn't cast out the devil in the child: "Because of your unbelief" (Matt. 17:20). He had already told the multitude that had gathered to watch that they were "faithless," and then He added that their unbelief was associated with "perversity," meaning that unbelief is serious business (vs. 17).

This is a dangerous subject, for fanaticism lurks just around the corner. We so easily think that if we had proper "faith," we could work miracles, speak with the tongues of angels, pick up poisonous snakes and let them bite us (Mark 16:17, 18), and "move mountains" (1 Cor. 13:2). But to be content to live in a humble home, and endure pain and poverty, is not necessarily "unbelief." Genuine, healthy faith is willing and happy to share with Christ His humiliation and sufferings.

If you haven't succeeded in reducing Mount Everest to the level of the Sahara desert, that doesn't mean you necessarily lack "faith." If you do work miracles, cast out devils, "prophecy" in Christ's name, and move mountains and do all kinds of wonderful works (see Matt. 7:22), you may still be "faithless" in that you have no *genuine* faith. Satan is a genius at deceiving the whole world with "signs and wonders" (Matt. 24:24; Rev. 13:3).

So, what is that genuine faith? It is "comprehending" the grand dimensions of the love that led Christ to His cross (Eph. 3:17-19), identifying with Him there (Gal 2:20), getting "married" to Him because you want nothing else (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7, 8), and taking up your cross to "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4, 5).

Our "bread" to share today is "the everlasting gospel" (Rev. 14:6, 7).

—*From the Writings of Robert J. Wieland*

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyQrdOZYuEg>

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