

were groping in darkness after an experience with reality. The best which their efforts had achieved was emptiness. Paul points them to "the living God" who had revealed Himself in "the Word of his grace." (With Zacharias in Luke 1:78-79 they could now say, "The day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.")

The greatest difficulty which you encounter as you try to "turn from these vanities unto the living God" is your fear that if you relinquish them your life will be empty. When I offer you Jesus I am extending to you the very substance of life. Listen to me. You live in a mad search for thrills. Christ offers you peace (Jn. 14:27). You pursue earthly knowledge. Christ would give you "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24). You cling to your worldly wealth. Christ would "commit to your trust the true riches" (Lk. 16:11). You seek to establish your own righteousness. Christ would give to you "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). You desire the abundant life. Christ would give to you abundant life, not only in this life but in the life to come.

How do you "turn from these vanities

unto the living God"? First, you must be convicted of your sin of refusing God and trusting in these vanities. You must be convinced of their emptiness and of God's ability to supply all your needs. Second, you must repent of your empty life. Repentance means a change of mind and attitude. You must see what your serving your self-made gods has done to the living God. You must see that your sin is not against yourself but against God. Third, in faith you must turn to Jesus who is the very fulness or essence of God. You must forsake your reliance upon the vanities of your empty life, and trust in Jesus for fullness of life, for salvation. You must turn from the folly of sin to a new life in Christ Jesus. Like Moses you must choose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt . . ." (Heb. 11:25-26).

And this you can do this very moment. I ask you, "Will you turn from these vanities unto the living God?" If you will say, "I will" and mean it, then you can, in truth, sing, "'Tis done; the great transaction's done! I am my Lord's, and he is mine . . ."

## SALVATION BY GRACE

June 14, 1959

Scripture: Acts 15:1-29

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they"—Acts 15:11

A problem had arisen on the mission field due to conflicting gospel messages being preached by Paul and Barnabas on the one hand and certain Jewish-Christians, or Judaizers, from Jerusalem on the other. The issue involved the very heart of the Christian gospel.

Upon hearing of the problem of the church in Antioch, which appointed Paul and Barnabas as missionaries, voluntarily requested a conference with the Jerusalem church of which the Judaizers were members. Subsequently duly appointed messengers from Antioch met with the entire Jerusalem church (Acts 15:12,22) to debate the matter in deliberative assembly.

This problem involved not only these

first-century Christians, but you and me as well. It centers about the question as to what constitutes the message of salvation for all ages. Therefore, let us examine the matter as we consider, first, the problem; second, the proposal; third, the provision.

First, note the problem. Paul and Barnabas had been preaching that Gentiles are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. The Judaizers insisted that salvation was for the Jews only. Therefore, for Gentiles to be saved they must first become Jews in their religion. Then they might be saved by faith in Jesus. Involved in their contention was the Gentiles' submission to the rite of circumcision and their keeping of the various ceremonial laws of Moses. Thus the issue was whether salvation was by grace through faith alone, or by faith plus works.

Doubtless the Judaizers were sincere in their contention. Their entire concept of salvation revolved about the idea of the Jew being the chosen people of God. Furthermore, had not Jesus said, "Salvation is of the Jews"? (Jn. 4:22). And "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24)? But the Judaizers' problem was that they misunderstood Jesus to refer to method rather than to the timing of God's redemptive work. For Jesus also said, "And other sheep have I, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (Jn. 10:16). "This fold" referred to the Jews. "Other sheep" referred to the Gentiles. Henceforth neither was to hear the voice of Moses but the voice of Jesus. Those who heard were to comprise a new Israel, Christian people, who would be "one fold" with "one shepherd." This truth the Judaizers had failed to grasp. But it was fully understood by Paul and Barnabas. Hence the problem.

Second, consider the proposal. After the apostles had reached an understanding with the leaders of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:2,9), the entire church assembled to hear the matter. First,

Peter, then Paul and Barnabas, related God's saving work among the Gentiles. Peter summarized, "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (v. 11). Note that he did not say that the Gentiles shall be saved by the same method as that of the Jews. Contrariwise he said that the Jew shall be saved in the identical manner as that of the Gentile—"through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Finally James, the pastor of the Jerusalem church and the most Hebraic of all the New Testament writers, spoke.

Quoting Amos 9:11, he concluded by expressing his opinion "that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God . . ." (v. 19). This decision was adopted by the entire congregation (vv.22ff.), with the understanding that a letter should be written to the churches acquainting them with this decision.

Third, note the provision. The heart of the letter stated, "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost (Spirit), and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well." (vv.28-29). Note that the decision of the church "assembled with one accord" (v.25, evidently the Judaizers did not vote) was that which "seemed good to the Holy Ghost (Spirit), and to us . . ." Thus the decision reached was the will of God made known through His church.

What was involved in this decision? First, they agreed that Gentiles—and Jews—were to be saved by grace through faith apart from works or ritual. Second they encouraged all Christian people to abstain from certain practices that they might demonstrate their new-found faith and freedom. Particularly they admonished the Gentile Christians to refrain from commonly accepted pagan practice—eating meat offered to idols and fornication—and from that which was ab

horred by the Jews—eating blood and animals which had been strangled. If it be objected that these latter two items were a part of Jewish ceremonialism, we remind you that these prohibitions antedated Moses. To Noah God had said, "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat" (Gen. 9:4).

But the sum-total of the decision was that salvation is by grace through faith and not by faith plus works. God does not require a Gentile to become a Jew before becoming a Christian. Nor does God have one plan of salvation for the Jew and another for the Gentile. In the words of Peter, "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."

Do you wonder why we have dwelt at length upon this historical account? It is because the problem involved is still with us.

A study of the Pauline Epistles will indicate that the Jerusalem Conference did not settle this matter. The Judaizers continued to preach faith plus works. But the apostle Paul continued to declare salvation by grace through faith. His message was ever that of Galatians 1:6-8, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel (other in kind): which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

In this light examine, if you will, the various methods of salvation being proclaimed today. Vast segments of Christianity insist that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ plus your own works or those of another. Some insist that you are saved through faith plus baptism. Others declare that you are saved by faith plus keeping the various ordinances or sacraments of the church. Still others would add to faith your works of personal righteousness. To each of these Paul says

in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace are ye saved (have been saved) through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." This reads like a summary of the decision of the Jerusalem Conference. Therefore, let us analyze it that you might know exactly what is the New Testament plan of salvation.

First, Paul says that your salvation depends not upon what you do, but upon what Christ has done for you. In Greek the words "are ye saved" are in the passive voice, indicating that salvation is achieved for you by another. The apostle further emphasizes this in the words "Not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Oh, that I might drive these words into your soul—"not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Paul continues "For we are his workmanship (not yours), created in Christ Jesus." The word "create" is always used in the Bible for a work of God, never of man. And it is a work wrought "in Christ Jesus," or through His death, resurrection, and continuing intercession before the throne of God.

What, then, is the place of your good works? Paul says that you are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works (not by them), which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." As the Jerusalem Conference said that the Gentiles were to abstain from certain things as an evidence of their salvation, so Paul says that you, as a Christian, are to walk in good works. Good works, then, are to be the fruit and not the root of your salvation. Dr. George W. Truett once said, "I would not trust my hope of heaven on the best second that I ever lived." Someone asked a great English preacher who was dying, "What is your hope now?" To which he replied, "I will scuttle the ship of good works, and float to glory on the plank of free grace."

Second, Paul says that this salvation

is to be appropriated by you through faith." John 3:16 says, "Whosoever believeth" not "whosoever believeth and worketh."

This faith is to be an active faith. You are not to sit and wait for God to save you. Rather, as Hebrews 4:16 says, you are to "come boldly unto the throne of grace." It must be a personal faith. If I give you a check you must endorse it in order to cash it. Such endorsement means that you make the check personal. By so doing you express your faith that the check is good, that the bank is solvent, that it is my will that you receive the amount written thereon, and that you are willing to receive it. God offers you a check for eternal life, drawn on the bank of His mercy and signed in the blood of His Son. It can be yours only if you make it personal through the endorsement of your faith.

Third, Paul says that this is a permanent salvation. Note that I translate this: "For by grace have ye been saved." In Greek the words "have ye been saved" render a word which is in the perfect passive form. The perfect tense expresses an action which happened in the past, is still going on, and will continue to go on. It is a finished work. So through faith in Jesus you may be saved, you are saved, and you will continue to be saved eternally. Some insist that once saved you may fall from grace. This idea appears twice in the New Testament (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 12:15). In both cases the sense is that if you follow a works way of salvation, you fall away from the grace way. It has nothing to do with falling out of grace once you are in grace. Your salvation in the beginning does not depend upon what you do, but upon what Christ has done for you. Therefore, the permanency of your salvation does not depend upon what you do from day to day, but upon what Christ has already done for you. It is the product not of your works, but of His grace.

What does the word "grace" mean? Originally it meant to make a gift, then

to forgive a debt, then to forgive a wrong, and finally to forgive sin. Reversing the order it means to forgive sin, forgive a wrong, forgive a debt, make a gift. So basically forgiveness of sin is a gift. As Romans 6:23 says, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." If I make you a gift—that's grace! If I forgive you a debt—that's grace! If I forgive you a wrong—that's grace! If God forgives your sin—that's grace!

If you appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ bearing a baptismal certificate, a record of your righteous deeds, a package of cancelled checks for money given to some benevolent cause—or any other of your own deeds—Christ will say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23). Therefore, while you still have life and hope, turn from your own efforts at salvation. In faith accept that which Christ has already done for you. "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God . . ." For with Peter "we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."

### *Like some extras?*

If you would like some extra copies of *The Beam* to hand out to your friends, we will be happy to send them to you. Just write (stating how many you will need) to:

**THE BEAM**

Box 12223

Ft. Worth 6, Texas