



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-10

OCTOBER 2014

The Gospel, Grace, And Work

The debate continues. What part do the choices of mankind play in the purposes of God? Is salvation a work of God or a choice of man? Is there a difference in God's role in initial salvation and the part he plays in our lives lived as rescued people? Is it a work of God and mankind? Is it a work of God through mankind? What has been done, and what remains to be done?

These questions have been asked and answered by many in every generation. Getting a clear view of the gospel, grace, and work is important for our generation as well.

A Clear View Of The Gospel!

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul gives as clear a view of the gospel and how it relates to grace and work as anywhere in the New Testament:

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I **preached** to you, which you **received**, in which you **stand**, and by which you **are being saved**, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the **grace of God** I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in*

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*vain. On the contrary, I **worked** harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*

1 Corinthians 15:1–10
(ESV—emphasis mine)

The gospel must, by its nature, be preached (proclaimed). It is an announcement of something that has already happened. It is not a prediction, though it holds all the hope that a heart could ever imagine. It is not a proposition, though it requires a response each time it is announced. It is not a warning, though it will judge those who

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reject it. God has acted in history—without any input from creation—to eradicate sin and forgive sinners. He did this by sending Jesus as the last Adam and final sacrifice to actually fulfill all previous promises and thereby form a people who could enjoy him and partner with him in blessing the whole world.

He “*died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures . . .*” In other words, this was the plan all along. Jesus' death was not “Plan B.” All the shadows, types, and hints from

the Old Testament narrative pointed to a final and full forgiveness for God's people. Anyone with eyes to see can find the gospel in every stage of biblical history. God has always intended to have a people who related to him without shame and fear. The narrative from Genesis onward pointed toward that day with those results. Those who miss this in reading the scripture, miss its real meaning. Sin was identified by God as the issue, and he worked out of his own love to condemn it. The narrative unmistakably reveals that God hates sin and hates what it does to the objects of his love. He will not tolerate it, and he has acted to condemn it in the flesh.

“*That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . .*” Jesus was no phantom. He lived and died as a man. He was raised by the power of God, vindicating his life and death and guaranteeing the beginning of a new race. This too, was encoded in the Old Testament narrative. Those with enlightened eyes could see it.

“*He then appeared . . .*” Notice that salvation is a personal encounter with a living Jesus. He didn't send a document to ratify his covenant. He met people. Salvation is relational at its core. Those who meet *him* can spend eternity getting to know him more. By contrast, those who only know *about* him will spend their lives trying to appease their perception of him.

The preached gospel is received. We hear with a willing heart. We choose to stake our whole lives on its veracity. Having chosen, we stand in this reality. Every decision is made from this standpoint. All other speculation about what might be true is abandoned, and the truth about God, self, sin, Satan, death, and life is embraced as valid and real. This is the platform from which life is lived. It is the same place that Jesus sits (Colossians 3:1-2). It is from this stance that God's life rescues and empowers the believer to enjoy God and engage the believer's own assignment. We are being saved from the deception of Satan's lies, the slavery of sin's domination, the shame of alienation, and the fear of our own failure.

A Comprehensive Demonstration Of Grace!

Paul makes it abundantly clear that his salvation was in no way related to his merit or efforts. He mentions that he was "*untimely born*" and totally unworthy of God's mercy. He didn't even qualify in the natural to be entrusted with the message that would change the world. He didn't walk with Jesus as the other apostles did. He was still persecuting Christians as late as Stephen's death. Only God's unconditional election of him includes him as one of the new people of God. He was as blind as the Pharisees he represented, until by God's own choice, Jesus appeared to him. This is grace. God initiates to accomplish his purpose. But this grace didn't stop with rescuing Saul from

hell. It included the call to participate in the divine plan to bless the world by preaching the gospel to all nations. All the chosen are called to participate. They will not all be given the same assignment, but they will have an assignment. This grace changed Paul. It always does. From persecutor, to

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promoter of the gospel of Jesus Christ! He had new eyes to see the kingdom of God from a spiritual viewpoint. He finally knew what the Old Testament was really about. He now loved what Jesus, his master, loved. He operated on the authority of the One who sent him and trusted the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead to empower him.

A Christian Attitude Toward Work!

There is no work on mankind's part to obtain salvation, but there is much work to fulfill the mission to which we are called in salvation. Since God is interested in demonstrating his grace, he features the imperfect and the incomplete who trust him. We have it all wrong and hold on to pharisaic theology that being good is the goal. Jesus made it plain to them that whatever good they could muster was not good enough. When will

we learn that lesson? It is not our goodness that we seek. It is his fellowship. He has given us that in Jesus' goodness for us. He has also given us the privilege of working with him in demonstrating his unworldly love toward those who have no idea that someone loves them, especially like that. When we begin to despair of ever living

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in light of his love, he reminds us that he works in us to will and do his good pleasure as we work out the salvation he has already put in us (Philippians 2:12–13). He works to replace our limited love with his unlimited love. The more we are aware of being loved, the more we trust and the more we love. When our limited love is expressed in another display of selfish control, he still loves us and works in us to repent and choose his resources rather than ours. One thing is for sure. We shall never change by focusing on attempts to act better. We change by discovering a deeper level of his love. It never fails.

In the last part of Matthew's Gospel, there are parables about judgment. In these we discover what really matters to God. One of the parables is about people being divided like sheep and goats. When those identified

as goats asked what was the determining factor, the answer was their works as related to Jesus (Matthew 25:31–46): "*When I was hungry . . . thirsty . . . a stranger . . . naked . . . sick . . . in prison . . .*" The wicked (goats) paid no attention to such people and thereby missed Jesus. They had no awareness of how their work related to Jesus and their own accountability. They might not have been engaged in lawless behavior. They just lived their own lives without regard to those that Jesus loves. The righteous (sheep) were attentive to such, and Jesus revealed that they were actually ministering to him. But they were not counting their deeds in an effort to impress or gain leverage with Jesus. They were expressing the same heart that had captured them. They were engaged in what matters to him. The righteous are often unnoticed and unknown, but they are never unrewarded by Jesus who is always watching. They see every opportunity to give away the love that compels them as an opportunity to magnify Jesus. He is the source of all grace, the subject of the gospel, and motivation to work.



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