

*Salvation: Profession
or Possession?*

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

GRACE PUBLICATIONS

P.O. BOX 18715

BALTIMORE, MD 21206

Printed in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

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Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

Thousands of people profess to be saved, saying they know Jesus Christ, but in reality, Jesus does not know them. They may appear to be religious. To know them, you would be positive that they are saved. They may do many good things, and may be very involved in church activities. But they are *unsaved believers* who have only responded to the presalvation work of the Holy Spirit.

I believe in eternal security. A Christian can never lose his salvation. Nevertheless, it is not up to me to judge anyone, regardless of outward appearances. Only God knows who is really saved.

The time is short and the days are evil. Jesus Christ's coming is imminent. As a pastor who is accountable before God and before his congregation, I must preach the truth, reproving and exhorting people to come unto Jesus before it's too late. These words will be seen as "hard say-

ings” to some, yet, this message is the product of much prayer, much study, much meditation, and many, many tears. While these words may prompt each reader to examine himself to see if he “be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5), my prayer is that the believer will be strengthened in his convictions. And, if there is one who is unsure, I pray that any doubts will be settled, once and for all, concerning this most precious gift—salvation.

Chapter One

FALSE PROFESSIONS

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). The Lord is “not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:27). Christ died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), and His body was offered “once for all” (Hebrews 10:10). God, in Christ, reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them (2 Corinthians 5:19). This is the unlimited atonement. There is no more offering for sin; therefore, becoming a Christian is not a sin issue. But only as many as *receive* Him are given “the power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12).

God is absolutely fair in His dealings with men. He has not raised a standard that can not be met. Every heathen, pagan, and atheist has a measure of God-consciousness (Romans 1:21). The Holy Spirit works in the conscience of the unsaved who are without the written Word (Ro-

mans 2:14-15). Creation itself is a testimony, to all men, of the reality of the Creator, for “that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20).

The Danger of Mental Assent

Many people who profess to be saved have only given “mental assent” to the Gospel. They *agree* with what they have heard, but their lives are never changed. This is cheap believe-ism. These people have not been born again—mental assent doesn’t save anyone. A person must receive Jesus Christ to be regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some ministries compromise with the world in order to get people to come to their church. Their attitude is, “We have to appeal to the world. If we compromise, they will come to our church.” “Christian” rock music, men wearing long hair, promiscuity, and immodest dress are all examples of compromise with the world. This kind of church may attract crowds, but

most of these people are never born again—they merely give mental assent to the Gospel.

There are probably thousands of unsaved believers in churches today. They believe that Jesus Christ died, shed His blood, was buried, and rose again. They even believe that He is coming back. These “believers” have given academic consent to the *knowledge* of the Gospel, but the devil came and took the Word out of their hearts, “lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). They are “forgetful hearers” (James 1:25).

Luke 8:13 speaks of those who hear the Word, and even receive it with joy, yet, “These have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.” I meet these people all the time. They come up and say, “Oh, pastor, we love this message. We love your church. This is so wonderful.” Still, they have no root. It doesn’t say they have “little” root; it says they have “no root.” When a trial comes along, these people are gone. “Bye-bye!” they say. “I didn’t know it was going to be *this* way.”

Verse 14 of Luke 8 talks about hearers who have “thorny soil” in their hearts. These people hear the Word and go forth as missionaries and preachers, but the cares, riches, and pleasures of

this life choke the Word. Distracted by the desire for temporal security, significance, and happiness, these unsaved believers “bring no fruit to perfection.”

But those who hear the Word of God and keep it “bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). The key word is “patience.” They can’t bring forth fruit all at once. They may experience isolated times of failure followed by rebound (1 John 1:9), but they *keep* the Word and they are growing—they are *saved believers*.

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:18-19). Demons “believe and tremble” at the reality of God, but they are not saved. They won’t be in heaven; they will be in hell, along with every unsaved believer.

No License for Sin

Everyone who comes unto Christ by grace through faith is born again and washed in the blood of the Lamb. Grace, however, must never be used as a license to sin.

Some people profess Christ as their Savior,

but later return to their former ways of living. They came under the presalvation work of the Spirit, but were never saved. 2 Peter 2:20-22 describes their condition:

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of this world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

I believe in eternal security. But, I also believe that I cannot add to or take away from the truth of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

Chapter Two

“I NEVER KNEW YOU”

“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Every unsaved believer will one day stand before Jesus Christ in the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. As they plead their cases, they will cry out, “Lord, we have cast out demons and have done many wonderful works in your name.” Yet, He will call them what they really are—workers of iniquity. These people will realize that they were never delivered from the power of the evil one nor trans-

lated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son.

In John 6:53, Jesus told His disciples, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." This offended many who had followed Him, and they "went back, and walked no more with him," revealing that they were never saved (John 6:60-66).

The Presalvation Response

Judas Iscariot *appeared* to be a disciple. He followed Jesus for three years and preached the Word of God. But Judas was never saved; he was the son of perdition. "Jesus answered [the disciples], Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve" (John 6:70-71).

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11:13, makes reference to "false apostles" and "deceitful workers." "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). In the end, these self-righteous "ministers" will have to depart from the presence of Jesus Christ.

God will take away what unsaved believers

seem to have. Though for a time they bear the appearance of being saved, their only spiritual encounter was what we call a presalvation experience. As the Holy Spirit ministers common grace to the unsaved, all seems well. But if they do not respond and go beyond mental assent to become truly saved, their hearts progressively harden.

Eventually, they die in their sins (John 8:24), having committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—the unpardonable sin (Matthew 12:31-32)—because they never received Christ as Savior. They never received saving grace, which cleanses and washes from all unrighteousness.

Sinning Willfully

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an

unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

“For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26-31).

The epistle to the Hebrews addresses trends that were going on in the first century Hebrew Christian church. Many in this church were drawing near with “true hearts” rooted in the assurance of faith in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:22). Their hearts were sprinkled with the Blood of the New Covenant, which kept them from Satanic influence in their consciences.

But many in that church were sinning willfully. There was a great persecution in those days. Temple sacrifices continued to be offered and Christians were under pressure to observe the Jewish law. Many who professed to be Christians went back to the temple sacrifices. In doing so, they rejected the one supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:26 calls this *willful* sin. The Greek adverb *hekousios* describes an act that is done deliberately, intentionally, and voluntarily.

A study of the Greek syntax in Hebrews 10:26 reveals that only the presalvation work of the

Holy Spirit had affected these professing Jewish Christians. They were sinning willfully *after receiving the knowledge of the truth*. The preposition *meta* (after) primarily denotes association and accompaniment. The word for *received* is an ingressive aorist active infinitive of *lambano*, which emphasizes the beginning of an action, and reveals that these people had entered into a relationship with the truth—they had an association or an accompaniment with it.

This becomes more evident when we examine the Greek word for knowledge, *epignosis*: the full, experiential knowledge of the truth. These people knew the Scriptures thoroughly and could quote them. They had perceived truth and it was transferred to their souls. Still, it had not passed through the human spirit, because they had not yet been saved. The Word did not profit them.

The truth of the Finished Work weighed heavily on their souls. On the other hand, the pressure of Judaism also weighed heavily on their souls. Ultimately, the persecution prevailed and many went back to the old temple sacrifices.

Full Justice

In Hebrews 10:29, the words “trodden under foot” are *katapateo* in the Greek text, a constative

aorist active participle. The constative aorist is a present continuing action from the past. They had consistently “trodden under foot the Son of God.” This indicates that these people had never been saved. Some of them were testifying. They were winning souls. Others were preaching. But all of it was done under the presalvation influence of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, Jesus will tell these unsaved believers that He never knew them. God declares that vengeance belongs to Him, in Hebrews 10:30, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35. Some scholars explain that *vengeance* actually means *full justice*. God isn’t vindictive, but He must repay with full justice.

Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world and gave His life in the unlimited atonement. *His* name is the only one by which men might be saved. But God is just, and His justice requires that those who reject His one sacrifice will receive the recompense for that decision; they will go to hell.

As unsaved believers come before Jesus Christ to stand in judgment, He will show them all the opportunities they had to be saved. They had presalvation joy, presalvation knowledge, and presalvation experience, but they insulted

the Holy Spirit by not receiving Christ. They will come face to face with Jesus and will realize that they were never saved. What they “seemed” to have will be taken away.

Chapter Three

ADVANCING INTO REIGNING GRACE

“Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:16-20).

The Holy Spirit’s presalvation work begins with the conviction of sin—not personal sin, but the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. Then, He convicts of righteousness—the Finished Work of Jesus Christ. Finally, the Spirit convicts of judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged. Through this conviction, the Holy Spirit grants repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).

True believers are those who receive the ex-

hortation to enter into the presence of God within the Holy of Holies. The way to this holy place was paved by the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19). Anyone who accepts God's New Covenant and comes before His throne with boldness and confidence will be made holy through this "new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20).

At the point of salvation, forty-five irrevocable things happen to the new believer. Among them, he is regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) and baptized by the Spirit into a position of union with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). The Christian receives the indwelling and sealing of the Spirit (Romans 8:11; Ephesians 1:13), and his name is written into the Lamb's Book of Life (Luke 10:20).

God opens the eyes of those who are truly saved, turning them "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith" in Christ (Acts 26:18).

Also, God has a plan for the life of each believer. A true Christian receives saving grace and then enters into growing grace (2 Peter 3:18). As he continues in God's Word, he becomes a dis-

ciple of Jesus Christ (John 8:31). A disciple is one who hears, learns, follows, and adjusts to categorical doctrine. That leads him to a personal revelation of Jesus Christ.

Then, God leads us into reigning grace, by which we begin to conquer our habits. “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17). We reign because we keep on receiving the abundance of grace and the gift of imparted righteousness through the Word of God.

A conqueror isn’t someone who never fails—all of us experience moments of weakness. A conqueror is someone who rebounds from his failure, recovers, and continues to grow in grace.

Examining Ourselves

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14).

These things are evidence of true salvation: loving the brethren, gathering together more and more as the day of Jesus Christ approaches (Hebrews 10:25), and having a willingness to receive correction from the Word of God (Hebrews 12:7). I can tell someone is on dangerous ground when he takes offense at creative encouragement; he reacts even though it is done lovingly and tenderly. "I know you are just trying to minister to me," he says with a sarcastic tone. This person is either seriously backslidden, or he is an unsaved believer.

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not" (Hebrews 12:6-7).

If a person who is really saved decides to go on a sin trip, it will not be a picnic. He will be warned by the Word of God through the messages he hears. He will be chastened by the Father. God will continue to deal with this believer until he repents. By ignoring chastisement and refusing to repent, the Father's discipline intensifies. The final stage of any divine chastisement is physical death without dying mercy. At this stage, God takes the believer home to heaven be-

fore his time. The believer will be in heaven, but he will suffer loss of all rewards.

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

This is the essence of the Finished Work. Jesus Christ works in us to produce His good pleasure. Through grace, mercy, and love, He is accomplishing His purpose in us. Let us seriously consider every class and sermon we hear. Let's listen with dignity, respect, and honor so we can operate in our free volition under the government of grace and mercy and in the faithful rest of God's peace.

CONCLUSION

Through the atonement, sin was dealt with. Now, salvation is merely an issue of receiving the “one sacrifice,” Jesus Christ. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29).

All Christians—especially new ones—need investment and grace. Every member of the body of Christ is a member in particular. Each of us needs great encouragement from the Word of God and the body of Christ.

Please do not take these thoughts and begin to evaluate people around you. Don’t let yourself begin to wonder “Is that person really saved?” Don’t ponder such thoughts.

For those who have read this and see themselves as unsaved believers, please come to Jesus Christ. Go beyond the presalvation state you are in. Receive the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart and begin to grow and reign in grace as an eternal child of God.