

Is Salvation Really a Free Gift?

The scriptures talk a lot about GRACE, the unmerited favor that God shows us when he saves us from our sins and grants us salvation. But we live in a material, visual world that seems to encourage us to be able to SEE our progress in every aspect of life, and many of our friends and family are still convinced that we must EARN something as special as salvation. Some of us think that our own good works contribute to our salvation in some way. Let's take a look at the Bible and track the notion of salvation as a free gift to see if our good works can actually earn us a spot in heaven.



Let's Define the Word

We better start with a definition of the word, "GIFT" as it is found in a variety of secular dictionaries. We need to understand the very nature of this word before we can begin to understand what God has done for us. Here are a few definitions from the dictionaries:

gift (noun)

Something bestowed freely.

gift (gÄft) n.

Something that is bestowed voluntarily and without compensation.

Gift Gift, n.

Anything given; anything voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation; a present; an offering.

It appears that the word GIFT inherently includes the notion of FREE. When something is given to us, it cannot be called a gift unless it is given to us without compensation of any kind. We can't pay for it, and we can't work for it. If we were to do that, it wouldn't be a gift at all, it would be a payment. Keep that in mind when you see the word 'gift' in the Bible. OK, let's now take a look at a few passages:



We Cannot Pay for Our Salvation with Good Works

The Bible is very clear about this fact. Scripture tells us that we simply CANNOT earn our way to heaven. Our good works are an imperfect means to a perfect destination. We could NEVER be good enough to find ourselves in a place of PERFECTION. For this reason, God has to do ALL the work of Salvation. Not a single good work can be applied to the task on our part, so there is absolutely nothing that we could ever boast about:



Ephesians 2:7-9 (KJV)

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.



God Applies His Righteousness to Us for Free

To make it even clearer, God tells us that the law only leads to death because the law requires perfection, something we could never attain. Salvation, therefore requires GOD to do all the work, because only God is perfect by His nature. That's why GRACE is given to us without cost:



Romans 5:14-18 (KJV)

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. 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. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.



Grace is Given to Us Freely Through Faith

There are a number of passages that continue this idea that GRACE is a Free Gift that is given to us without the payment of our own good works. God justifies us "by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28) and grants us His "righteousness without works" (Romans 4:6). This theme is repeated in many places in the scriptures:



Romans 3:21-24

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

God intends His Salvation to be a gift that is given without compensation. He knows that when we try to earn our way to heaven we become prideful and arrogant, judgmental and independent. When we deny God's total work, we tend to start to think of ourselves as God, and this is a form of idolatry that God will not tolerate. Maybe this is why those who have tried to earn or purchase the Gift of the Holy Spirit throughout the ages have been scolded by the apostles:



Acts 8:18-21

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Let's not offend God by adopting ANY faith system that would argue that your good works contribute in ANY way to your salvation.