

When “Work” Isn't “A Work”

by F. LaGard Smith

The usual question everybody seems to keep asking is whether the [drowning] man who reaches for the life-preserver [that has been thrown to him] is saved by grace or by works. That's too easy. The answer (grace) is obvious. The far more compelling question invariably seems to get lost in the fog of battle: Despite the grace of having been thrown a life-preserver, *would our man have survived had he not grabbed hold of it?* It goes without saying, really.

So what does this suggest about the possibility that those who are rescued from sin by God's amazing grace may have a role to play in their own salvation that couldn't be more greatly distanced from either “work” or merit?

Or is “work” and merit even the real concern? To the outsider, Calvinism seems absolutely obsessed about God's remaining in control. But by what twisted logic do we assume that humble acts of obedience on the part of man (such as faith, repentance, and baptism) somehow wrest control from the God who commands those very acts? How can *submitting* to God's control possibly obligate God to act, or put him in our debt?

Recognizing unequivocally that no “work” on our part could ever put us in the driver's seat instead of God, still, we see Paul urging the disciples in Philippi to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12-13). When it comes to our salvation, the fact that God is working within us to fulfill his own purposes does not exclude the fact that we ourselves have a vital role to play.

Calvinists undoubtedly would agree, but would insist nevertheless that our part in “working out our own salvation” is solely empowered by the Holy Spirit working within us. It's worthy of note that Paul speaks here of our being literally *energized* by God, but in other passages frequently admonishes “energized” disciples for not fulfilling their roles as they ought. If it is God alone who is responsible for “energizing” whatever *good* might manifest itself in the lives of his elect, how can we escape the conclusion that any *shortcomings* in their lives must

also be attributed directly to God? Surely God must expect man to exercise initiative and bear personal responsibility in a number of ways even apart from the Holy Spirit moving in one's life.

But if man truly does have a separate role to play, does this mean that salvation is somehow a joint-enterprise? Not if that implies God's power or grace is insufficient; or that we ourselves must somehow top off the tank of grace; or that God has credited our account with 99% of what we owe and we must provide the final 1%. No!

*Jesus paid it all;
All to him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.*

“Jesus Paid it All,” Mrs. H. M. Hall.
Troubling Questions for Calvinists. Lynchburg, VA: Cotswold, 2007. 38-39.

Remember your leaders, who spoke God's message to you; reflect on the outcome of their lives and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever! (Hebrews 13:7-8, New English Translation).

“Your Leaders”

by Dick France

The same term will recur in 13:17 and 24. This is the only term in this letter for office-bearers within the church. In 13:17 and 24 the term clearly refers to those still holding responsibility within the community, but here (v. 7) the call to *remember*, the fact that *spoke* is in the past tense, and the mention of the *outcome* of their lives, all point rather to those who have already died, perhaps especially to those through whose witness this church was first set up.

Such people are to be remembered with honor, and their lives and work to be an example for those who follow on. *Imitation* is a frequent theme in the New Testament: we learn by example as well as by teaching. It is the awesome responsibility of those who *lead* (and few of us do not in some small sphere at least) to leave a suitable model for others to copy.

The *leaders*, it seems, have died, and it is only by memory that their help may now be obtained. But it is not so with Jesus, the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (12:2). He is not just a memory but a present Lord, who “always lives to make intercession for us” (7:25). That is why he, rather than the transient possession of money, is the secure basis for our faith.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for your unchanging love and power. As our world changes, and we ourselves change, may we remain secure in your unchangeableness.

Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. 210-211.

Area-Wide Singing: Plan to attend the area wide singing on the afternoon of July 22 at the Safford church facility. Singing starts at 4:00 P.M. We will adjourn at 5:15 for potluck dinner and then begin evening Worship at 6:30 P.M. Mickey Harrison, the minister at the Morenci church, will deliver the lesson during the evening worship assembly.

Prayer List

Healing: Jules Arnes, Faye Atchley (Ben's mom), Nicolas Self, Douglas Gardner, Brandon (Gerry Clark's grandson), Diane Cocks's brother-in-law, Ben Atchley, Dave Morse, Richard Tuey. **Personal:** Richard and Skeet Posey, Members of the Morenci church. **Travels:** Brian and Billy Martin, John and Sharon Cunningham, Greg and Louella Briggs (and grandkids), Jesse Short.

CHURCH OF CHRIST

3888 S Hwy 191, Safford, AZ 85546

15 July 2012

Sermon Topics

A.M. Encourage One Another

1 Thes 4:18; 5:11

P.M. Remember Your Leaders

Heb 13:7-8

Evangelist

Ken Knowlton: 428-5974

Elders

Ben Atchley: 428-2246

Greg Briggs: 428-8756

John Cunningham: 428-0895

Services

Sunday Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship	11:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesday Evening Class	6:30 P.M.