

Saved By Grace Through Faith

by David A. Huston

This paper is presented to refute the belief that the requirement of water baptism contradicts the doctrine of 'salvation by grace through faith.'

THE BIBLE STATES THAT we are saved “by grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Grace pertains to what God does for us, and faith pertains to our response to His grace. For example, because of His grace God took on human nature and died for our sins. He didn't have to do that, but He did it because He loved us. That is grace. It was also because of grace that He brought the gospel to our ears and offered us the opportunity to respond to it. Again, He didn't have to do that, but He did it because He loved us. That is grace.

Apart from this grace, which flows spontaneously out of God, it is impossible to be saved. Romans 10:17 states that “faith comes by hearing” and Romans 10:15 asks, “And how shall they hear without a preacher?” If God had not laid down His life for us on the cross and then sent someone to tell us about it, we could not have faith and could therefore not be saved. Perhaps this is why Ephesians 2:8 says that we are saved by grace through faith, but then adds, “And that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” It is God's gift to us in the sense that we could never have had it on our own.

We can conclude then that we are saved by grace through faith alone, and nothing needs to be added to our faith. In Ephesians 2:9 Paul emphasized this point by saying, “Not of works, lest anyone should boast.” None of us have any basis for boasting. None of us deserve salvation. None of us can contribute one iota to our salvation. God has done it all—we have only received it through faith, and that a gift from God.

What is Faith?

Having thus established the doctrine of salvation through faith alone, the question then arises: What is faith? To answer this question let's look at some examples of faith in the book of Acts. In Acts 16:30, for example, the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” This response is in perfect accord with the doctrine of salvation through faith alone. But in Acts 2:37, Peter and the rest of the apostles were asked a similar question: “Men and brethren, what shall

we do?” Peter, however, said nothing specifically about faith. Instead he responded, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” (v.38)

If we put these two passages together, we realize that believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is equal to repenting and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Both passage say the same thing, only using different terms. We see this confirmed in Acts 19. Paul had come across some disciples of John the Baptist. After learning that they were unaware of the gift of the Holy Spirit, he asked them about their baptism. They responded that they had only received the baptized of John. Paul then explained, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (v.4). Paul’s instruction to these men was that they were to believe on Christ Jesus. But the next verse says, “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v.5). These men understood that to believe on the Lord Jesus meant being baptized in His name.

We see this confirmed again in Acts 8. Philip met up with an Ethiopian who had been visiting Jerusalem and was trying to understand the writings of Isaiah the prophet. The Bible says, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him” (v.35). All this passage tells us is that Philip preached Jesus; yet the very next thing the Ethiopian said was, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (v.36). Philip’s response to this question was, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And the Ethiopian’s response to Philip was, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (v.37). Based on this confession of faith Philip baptized the man.

Baptism is Believing

In the example of the Philippian jailor, after Paul and Silas told him he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, the Bible then says, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.” We have no way of knowing everything the apostles said to this family, only that they spoke the Word of the Lord. But the response to what they spoke is unambiguous: “And immediately he and all his family were baptized” After they had been baptized the Bible says, “And he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household” (Acts 16:32-34).

Believing in Jesus Christ and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ are equivalent concepts. Jesus Himself instructed, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:15-16). Salvation comes through believing, but believing is incomplete apart from baptism. To repent and be baptized is how we believe.

Writing to the Romans Paul said, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘LORD, who has believed our report?’” (Romans 10:16). First Paul asserted that everyone has not obeyed the gospel, but then he supported that assertion by quoting Isaiah’s rhetorical question, “Who has believed our report?” This means that the failure to obey the gospel is equal to failing to believe the apostles’ report. And what does the gospel call us to obey? The command to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

As he stood before the counsel and testified of Jesus, Peter declared, “And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32). We see this actually happening in Acts 19 where we read, “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:5-6). They obeyed the gospel by being baptized and God responded by giving them the Holy Spirit.

We also see this happening in Acts 8 where we read, “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14-17). Notice that these people had received the Word of God and obeyed it by being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. It was therefore only a matter of time before the promise would be fulfilled. Because they had obeyed the gospel, God gave them the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation Through Faith

Do we believe in salvation by grace through faith alone? Absolutely. It is clearly a biblical doctrine. But we must understand that biblical faith is more than a mere acceptance of truth; it also requires an active response. As James wrote, “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17). The NIV says it this way, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” For faith to come alive, it must be expressed in obedience to the gospel, which includes repenting and being baptized by full immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ. All who obey God in this way are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is not a doctrine of salvation by works; it is a doctrine of salvation through active faith, since the passive faith of inaction is described as dead. The Amplified Bible expresses James 2:17 this way: “So also faith, if it does not have works (deeds and actions of obedience to back it up), by itself is destitute of

power (inoperative, dead).” Any faith that is inoperative and destitute of power cannot appropriate God’s gracious gift of salvation.

NOTE: This article appeared in the February 2007 issue of the *Pentecostal Herald*, the official publication of the United Pentecostal Church International.

Note to the reader:

If you would like to comment on the contents of this paper, please contact us through our website at www.GloriousChurch.com. We welcome and appreciate all honest comments, questions, and criticisms.

Copyright © 2007 David Huston

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this article may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher or author; **EXCEPT THAT PERMISSION IS GRANTED** to reprint all or part of this document for personal study and research provided that reprints are not offered for sale.

All Scripture references are from the New King James Version of the Bible®, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN, unless otherwise indicated.

Published by

Rosh Pinnah Publications

PO Box 337, Carlisle, PA 17013 717-249-2059

www.RoshPinnah.com RoshPinnah@aol.com

Rosh Pinnah means ‘Chief Cornerstone’ in Hebrew.

