

NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

What is the ultimate cause of our salvation? Are we saved wholly and solely by the grace of God, or is there some cause in us that merits salvation? Does God save those who deserve to be saved, or does he save those who really ought to burn in the flames of eternal damnation.

Most of us know too much about ourselves, and our own track record, to think we could expect to be saved for heaven, based solely on our own merit. We have failed too often; our record is too faulty. If one transgression was sufficient to condemn Adam and all his posterity to eternal damnation, then surely none of us could hope to look to our own record as the basis of any claim on God and his goodness. The carnal pride of man is such that we would like to find something in ourselves that merits salvation, and at some moment, we might actually think we have some claim on God, but after we have thought about the matter, and after we have considered even a few of our transgressions, we have to admit that it is not so.

The main point of contention between those who truly believe the Bible and others has to do with that one question: Are we saved wholly and solely by the grace of God, or is there some cause in us that merits salvation? Most any Christian will admit that salvation is by grace. The Bible states that fact too clearly for anybody to deny it, but what does the Bible mean when it talks about salvation by grace?

Actually, the question revolves around the nature and attributes of God. Much of the confusion about the Bible would be resolved if we could only acknowledge what the righteousness of God requires. Most people have an entirely inadequate idea of what God is like, and what his righteousness requires. Somehow, the majority of religious people seem to have gotten the idea that all God requires of them is a good average. They seem to have the idea that what God requires is that we do good more often than we do bad---if our good outweighs our bad, then we will be alright.

One of the earliest recollections I have is of one day when I was very small. My grandmother took me on her knee, and began to explain to me what God expected of me. Now, my grandmother was one of the finest people who ever lived. I suppose most folks believe that about their grandmother, but my grandmother was---she was one of the finest of all people. And she was a very religious person. She was confused about religion, but she was sure that what she had been taught was right, and she was very devoted to it.

She explained to me that there was a day coming, when I would stand before God in judgment, and I would be confronted by everything I had ever done. She explained that there would be a mighty pair of scales, and all of my good works would be placed on one side of the scales, and all of my bad works would be placed on the other side of the scales. Whichever outweighed the other would determine where I would spend eternity. If I had more good works than I had bad works, I would spend eternity with God in heaven, and if I had more bad works than I had good works, I would suffer eternal woe and misery.

Well, to a little three or four old boy that sounded reasonable enough, and I am sure that my grandmother was sure she was arguing God's case for him. She was trying to encourage me to build up a dependable record of good works.

What my grandmother did not realize was that she was pleading for a very low standard, and she was allowing that standard was sufficient to gain a home in eternal heaven. It is amazing how people can fail to realize what they are saying in matters of religion. Do you see? Without having the slightest idea of what she was saying, my grandmother was arguing that all God requires of us is a good average---all he requires is that our good outweighs our bad.

That was not what she meant to say at all. She did not believe any such thing. She was a highly moral person, and she had no idea of what she was saying. She had been taught that in order to gain eternal heaven, we must produce more good works than bad works, and if our good outweighs our bad, we will be good candidates for heaven. She did not realize that if that was right, all God requires is a good average.

Why, the law of the land is not that lenient. Suppose a person is arrested for some crime, and his attorney tries to argue for a good average, do you suppose the jury is going to be impressed? It does not matter that there are more banks he did not rob than there are banks which he did rob. They are only interested in the one bank he did rob. They are not interested in all the people he did not kill, they are only interested in the one person he did kill.

In its own way, the law of the land demands absolute perfection, and it will not accept anything less. You may not think the law of the land demands absolute perfection, but it does. The law does not deal with every moral infraction of which you may be guilty. For instance, it is wrong for you to think mean and spiteful thoughts about your neighbor, but the law of the land does not deal with mean and spiteful thoughts. It is wrong for you to entertain base and lustful thoughts about your neighbor's wife, but the law does not deal with base and lustful thoughts.

But while the law does not deal with every sinful deed of which you may be guilty, with regard to those offenses with which it does deal, the law demands absolute perfection. The law does not forbid you to think mean and spiteful thoughts about your neighbor, but it does forbid you to take a club and hit him over the head. It forbids you to take a club and hit so much as one person. In that regard, the law of the land demands absolute perfection, and it will accept nothing less. It does not forbid you to think base and lustful thoughts about your neighbor's wife, but it does forbid you to give free reign to those thoughts and assault your neighbor's wife. Again, in that regard, the law demands absolute perfection. It does not really matter that you may have repressed your impulses more often than not, one offense is sufficient to bring you into conflict with the law.

The law of God is different from the law of the land in that it forbids every transgression of every kind. The law of the land demands perfection with regard to those offenses with which it deals. The law of God demands perfection with regard to every transgression. It will not tolerate so much as one sin, and just as surely as one act of murder will bring on you the full force of the law of the land, were it not for the grace of God, one hateful thought would bring on you the full force of the law of God, and that one offense would be sufficient to doom you to eternal damnation.

As plausible as it may sound at first, the argument that our home in heaven depends on whether our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds would not even satisfy a court of law in our day, and it certainly will not satisfy the justice of God. The only thing that will satisfy divine justice is the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. If the absolute righteousness, the absolute perfection, of the Lord Jesus Christ has not been imputed to our account, we will never see eternal heaven.

If you stand before God in eternal judgment with so much as one sin charged to your account, you can never stand justified before him, and you cannot expect to spend eternity in heaven with him. The one sin of Adam was sufficient to condemn the entire race of mankind, and one sin on your part is enough to separate you from God for all eternity. A good average will not do. If your sins---all of your sins---have not been charged against the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if the pure and spotless righteousness of the Lord Jesus has not been credited to your account, eternal damnation will be your doom.

The main reason people sometimes get the idea they can be justified before God by their own works is that they do not have the slightest idea of what the righteousness of God requires. They have no idea of how righteous God is, and they have no idea of

what the righteousness of God requires of them. The Bible is filled with statements about what the righteousness of God requires, but it seems that most people have failed to notice.

Job. 25:4,5 is just one example. "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not: Yea, the stars are not pure in his sight."

The stars are the purest things in all of creation, and yet, this text says that even the stars are not pure in his sight. Consider for a moment how pure the stars are. Heat is the universal purifying agent. The stars are the hottest things in the universe, and they must, of necessity, be the purest things in the universe.

About two years ago, several people on the West Coast became sick from eating contaminated meat. One little boy died. The meat was contaminated with something called E Coli bacteria. The authorities advised people that if they would start cooking all meats at a higher temperature, the bacteria would be killed. To that extent the meat would be purified; the bacteria would be killed.

A few weeks later, the water system of Milwaukee, Wisconsin became contaminated. Again, people began to get sick. The authorities advised people to boil their drinking water. The heat would kill the bacteria. Sufficient heat does have a purifying effect.

In refining silver, the ore is heated to a high enough temperature to melt the silver. The impurities rise to the surface and they are skimmed off. That process is repeated over and over until no more impurities can be removed. The Bible talked about that. Psa. 12:6, "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."

Heat has always been relied on as the universal purifier, but none of those examples even remotely compares to the purity of the stars. The stars are the hottest things in all of creation. As hot as they are, the stars are so pure that our minds cannot even imagine how pure they are. They are pure beyond our comprehension.

Astronomers estimate the temperature of the stars in the tens of thousands, or even the millions, of degrees. They tell us the stars are so hot that even the metals in the stars, the iron and so on, are in a gaseous state. Iron melts at 2785 degrees, and it boils at 4755 degrees. It literally vaporizes (it becomes a gas) at 4755 degrees. Those of us who never deal with such high temperatures have difficulty thinking of iron in a

gaseous state, but it does vaporize if you get it hot enough. Astronomers tell us that every particle of iron in the stars is in a gaseous state.

As any substance is heated, the tiny little electrons that spin around the nucleus of the atoms of that substance begin to spin faster and faster and faster. The hotter the material becomes, the faster the electrons spin. And the faster they go, the more they spin off and break away from any other atom that may have attached itself to that atom. When the material becomes so hot, every atom breaks away from every other atom. Finally, every atom stands alone. Every atom is free from every contaminating atom. The substance is as pure as anything in nature can be.

That is how hot the stars are, and that is how pure they are, but listen to what the text says, "How, then, can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; Yea, the stars are not pure in his sight." There is no way anything in nature can be made any more pure than the stars, and yet not even the stars are pure in God's sight.

Those of you, who think you can get to heaven on your good average, have never realized how righteous God is, and what righteousness he requires of us. If the stars are not pure in his sight, do you suppose that with all your impure thoughts and impure deeds, you could ever stand justified before God based on your own merit?

The only thing that will satisfy God is absolute perfection, and the only source of absolute perfection is the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The only way you will ever stand justified before God is for God to look at you and see, not your track record, but to look at you and see the righteousness of his Son credited to your account.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that our record is too faulty, and our sins are too many, for us to ever expect to be justified before God by our works. If our judgment is based on our works, we will be lost world without end.

It is obvious that none of us in this day could be justified by our own works, but what about the saints we read about in the Bible? Were they not such men that they could have been justified by works? They were so faithful, and they performed such notable deeds, you would think that, perhaps, some of them might have earned some kind of merit with God. During the remainder of this booklet we will look at some of those men. We will look at Adam and Noah, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses and David, and the apostle Peter. I believe we can demonstrate that if salvation is not wholly and solely by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, that not even

those men could ever live in eternal heaven. If salvation is not by grace, not even the most eminent saints could be saved.

You can be sure that if none of those men of God could be saved, based on their own merit, there is none of us, sinners that we are, who would stand a chance. If not even the stars are pure in his sight, you can be sure that you and I could never qualify.

The justice of God requires absolute perfection. Unless we have always, at all times, and in every instance, refrained from every transgression, no matter how insignificant we may think that transgression may have been, we can never expect to be justified before God by our own works.

There is nobody, outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, who fits that description. There is nobody who has always done exactly what was right, and in our hearts we know that to be a fact. That is why those people, who claim they expect to be justified before God by their works, invariably fear death so much more than those who are trusting only in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. No matter how they may protest to the contrary, in their hearts they know they could never stand before God justified on the basis of their own merit, and because of that, they usually come to the hour of death terrified.

Both by precept and by example the Bible teaches that our salvation for eternal heaven is based solely on the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is a simple matter to produce a long list of proof texts proving that salvation is by grace.

Eph. 2:8,9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of ourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

Titus 3:4,5, "But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

II Tim. 1:9, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

The first text says that our salvation is not of works; the next text says that it is not by works; and the third text says that it is not according to our works. God knew there would be those who would try to evade the clear teaching of the Bible, especially on the subject of salvation by grace. So he moved the apostle to say the same thing three different ways. He cut off every avenue of escape for those who

would deny the simple fact that salvation is by grace and grace alone. It is not based on any merit of our own.

We will not multiply proof texts to show that the Bible teaches salvation by grace. It is clear enough that salvation by grace is the doctrine of the Bible. It is safe to say that every person, who claims to believe the Bible, acknowledges that the Bible teaches salvation by grace. They disagree vigorously about what is actually meant by that expression, but all will agree that salvation by grace is the doctrine of the Bible. In this little booklet we are interested in showing what that expression means, and in showing that the Bible teaches that doctrine by example as well as by precept.

The Bible records the lives of the most eminent saints, and the Bible record of their lives shows that not even those men could be justified before God by their own works. The Bible is very faithful to provide a clear and accurate account of its characters. It records their faults as faithfully as it records their virtues, and the Bible account leaves us without a doubt: unless salvation is by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, there will nobody be saved. Consider with us, if you will, some of those characters and see if you can find one that could have been saved by his own good works.

If there was ever anybody who had an opportunity to be justified by works, Adam did. There was nothing wrong with Adam as God created him. God created him *able to stand, but liable to fall*. He did not have to do what he did. His sin was willful and deliberate. In his original creation Adam did not have the sinful nature, that inborn appetite for sin, that you and I have. He sinned against light and knowledge. He could have kept God's commandments. He did not have the positive bias toward sin that has dominated the heart and mind of every person who has been born since his day. And still he sinned. Consider his case.

Except for the Lord Jesus Christ, Adam was the brightest man who ever lived. One hundred rocket scientists all rolled into one could not have equalled the genius of Adam. Does the Bible say that? Well, no, it does not say that in so many words, but it does demonstrate it. God gave a simple demonstration of how smart Adam was.

Gen. 2:19, "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." Think about that. Adam gave names to every living creature on earth. Nobody knows for sure how many different species of living creature there are, because scientists cannot agree on what actually constitutes a species. A lot of scientists claim there are over

300,000 different species. The smallest estimate I have ever seen says there are over 17,000. Suppose the smaller number is correct. Suppose there are only 17,000 different species. That still means that Adam came up with over 17,000 names for the different living creatures.

That is a monumental task, just to come up with that many different names. Just think of the difficulty of even coming up with that many different combinations of sounds. If you and I were trying to do that, it would not be long until we would have exhausted all our ideas, and we would have a baboon, a bowboon, and a booboon. All our names would begin to sound alike; we could never keep them separated.

Not only did he come up with all the necessary names, he came up with appropriate names. The names stuck. The text says, "Whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." Whatever name Adam came up with actually became the name of that living creature. "That was the name thereof," that was what people called it. We have trouble naming churches and making the names stick. There are churches all over the land that have one official name, and another name by which most people know it, and in some cases not many people even know the proper name of that church; it is so commonly called by another name. If the name Adam provided had not been suitable to the creature to which he attached it, eventually people would have begun to call it by a different name, but the names stuck.

Not only did Adam come up with thousands of appropriate names for all the different living creatures, he remembered what he had called them. He remembered the names---all those thousands of names---and he remembered which animal each name identified. Most of us have trouble meeting three or four people at a time and keeping the names straight. Adam could keep thousands of names straight the first time.

Let me ask you: did you ever study a foreign language in school? No doubt, many of you have. What was the hardest part of learning the language? Building a vocabulary, right? That is the most difficult part, and the most important. For that matter, if you can build a sufficient vocabulary, you can manage to get by with very little knowledge of grammar. If you know enough words in any language, you can string words together, in some fashion, and the other person can usually puzzle out what you are trying to say.

Suppose somebody is learning a foreign language, and he goes to the local Waldenbooks, or B Daltons, or some other bookstore, and buys a dual language dictionary, perhaps a Spanish-English, or a French-English dictionary. The larger dual language dictionaries usually have about 15,000 entries from each language. That is

about the same number as the smallest estimate of the number of different kinds of living creatures in the world. Now suppose he sits down, reads the dictionary, and lays it on the shelf. He will never need to consult it again, because he has already read it; he knows the foreign language equivalent of all the words listed.

Do you know anybody who could do that? No, of course not. To learn that many different foreign language words you have to drill, drill, and drill for years. There is nobody on earth who could sit down, read the dictionary, and remember all the words he had read. But Adam could. Adam remembered what he had named every creature. If he had not remembered, who could have told him?

Not only could Adam have remembered every entry in the dictionary, he could have first written the book, and then he could have remembered what he had written. That is essentially what he did in giving names to every living creature. There is nobody today who could even come close to that.

We hear a lot nowadays about the great power of our subconscious mind. We are told that we only use about 3 per cent, or maybe 10 per cent, of our total brain power. Well, I have no doubt that is right. Our brains do not function at full capacity. But the thing those people do not tell you---because they probably do not know---is that when Adam sinned, he blew most of the circuits. Our brains do not function the way Adam's brain did. Our brains have been crippled by Adam's sin, and all the cultivation, and all the education, and all the self-help courses in the world will never put it back.

There are those who will tell you that the serpent tricked Adam into doing what he did. But you can be sure that the serpent did not trick Adam. The devil is smarter than you and I are, but Adam was too bright for the devil to outsmart him. God knew somebody would come along with that notion. That is why he moved Paul to say, "Adam was not deceived (he was not tricked), but the woman being deceived was in the transgression," I Tim. 2:14. Adam knew exactly what he was doing. Adam knew that God was telling the truth, and that the serpent was lying, but he acted as if it was the other way around. He acted as God was lying, and the serpent was telling the truth.

The serpent began by saying, "Yea, hath God said...." He challenged the honesty of God. Satan has been a liar from the beginning; he is the Father of Lies. John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it."

When Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, he acted as if the serpent, the father of lies, was telling the truth, and God, the very embodiment of truth, was lying. Let me ask you: do you believe that anybody who makes God out to be a liar, and more than that, who acts as if God is a worse liar than the devil himself, can expect to get to heaven by his own righteousness?

Let me tell you: if salvation for heaven is by works, Adam will never make it.

Bible makes it clear enough that Adam was a child of God. The skins God provided as a covering for the nakedness of Adam and Eve were symbolic of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, the lamb slain for the sins of his people. The symbolic lesson is that Adam's sins were atoned for by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and that he is clothed with his imputed righteousness. Adam was a child of God, and we shall see him in heaven one day, but it will not be by his own righteousness. Based on his righteousness he would never make it.

What about Noah? Was Noah such a character that he deserved to be saved? Was his life so attuned to the will of God, that he had some claim on God. Did God owe it to Noah to save him?

Noah lived in what was probably the most wicked age of the world. No matter how wicked men may be, as they grow older, they generally begin to calm down somewhat. The thought of dying seems to have a sobering effect. In Noah's day people lived to be close to a thousand years old. Considering that fact, and considering that Noah was born when the earth was just a little over a thousand years old, it is a mathematical fact, that during Noah's day most everybody who had ever lived was still living.

Very few people had ever died. In an age when death seemed to be only a remote possibility, we cannot imagine how wicked people must have been. The Bible tells us, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," Gen. 6:5. Think about that. He says their thoughts were *only evil*. They did not think about anything else, and more than that, they thought about it *continually*. They thought about nothing but evil, and they thought about it continually.

In verse eleven he tells us, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." There was nowhere to hide. The earth was *filled with violence*. The entire earth was a Lebanon, or a Bosnia, or a Somalia. As wicked as the world is today, it is not that bad yet. We are getting there, but we are not there yet.

But in the midst of that wicked generation, there was, at least, one righteous man. Verses 9, and 10, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God." In that wicked age this one righteous man *walked with God*.

God determined to destroy the entire world, and all the wickedness in it, but he chose Noah to be the one man through whose family he would preserve the human race. All of mankind would perish except Noah and his family, and it would be that family who would repopulate the new world. No other person on the planet was so honored as Noah was. After God had swept the world clean by the waters of the flood, Noah would stand at the head of the entire family of man. Except for his daughters-in-law, every person on earth, from that day forward, would be a descendent of Noah. No other person on earth was so honored and so blessed as he was.

After the flood we are told that "Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him, " Gen. 9:20-23.

Notice that Noah woke from his wine and "saw what his younger son had *done* unto him." Ham did more than look. Those people have been around for a long time, and their conduct had always been repulsive to decent, moral people.

Noah was blessed as no other man on earth was blessed. He was honored as no other man on earth was honored. When the world was literally filled with violence and wickedness, Noah walked with God. Later, when the earth had been swept clean of all the sin and violence, you would think it would have been easier for him to live a godly life. Instead, Noah sinned. He planted a vineyard, and made wine, and got stinking, stumbling, falling down, passed out, stark naked, drunk.

If salvation is by works, Noah will never make it. A good average will not do. The law of God demands perfection, and Noah was certainly not perfect. Now, Noah was a child of God. There can be no doubt; "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Noah will be in heaven, but he will not be there because of his own righteousness; he will be there because he was a subject of grace. He will be there

because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

What about Abraham? If there is anybody in the Bible that we might expect to have earned a home in heaven, it is Abraham. He is the father of the people of Israel, and one of the most notable characters in all of human history. We call him the Father of the Faithful. We are amazed at his great faith. Who could forget Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah? In Genesis, chapter twenty-two, we read that God told Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Abraham did not hesitate. He rose early the next morning and started on his way.

I have to confess that there is a lot I do not understand about what transpired on the mountain that day, but God knew exactly what he was doing. He knew exactly the way this matter was going to work out, and he knew what Abraham's response would be. He declares "the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure," Isa. 46:10. God is never surprised. He knows exactly what lies ahead.

Abraham did not. He did not know how far this matter would go, but he was convinced that he and the boy would go up on the mountain, and he was convinced that he and the boy would come back down again. When he got to the mountain, he told the servant to stay at the foot of the mountain, and he said, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." He did not say, "The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and I will come again to you." He fully expected that Isaac would come back down off the mountain with him. Paul says that he accounted that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure," Heb. 11:19. Abraham was convinced that God would raise him up, even from the ashes, if the matter went that far.

Sometimes I hear somebody use the expression, "If I know my own heart." Let me tell you; you don't. None of us entirely understands his own heart. Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it," Jer. 17:9. I gave up long ago trying to figure out other people; I don't entirely understand myself. There is ever so much I do not understand about myself. I do not always understand why I am the way I am, nor why I do the way I do. But as little as I understand myself, I am sure that I know myself well enough to know that I could never do what Abraham did. My wife and I have four children, and I cannot tell you how much I love those children; they mean more than life to me. I have one son, and he is a very special person to me. There is no way I could take my son up on that

mountain the way Abraham did with Isaac. I am sure there is no way I could ever be so submissive as Abraham was. His faithfulness is more than I can understand.

If that was all the Bible told us about Abraham, we might get the idea that Abraham could have been saved by works. Such faith is more than we could expect from any father. But there is more. The Bible is the most accurate of all books. It is more faithful to the facts than any other book that has ever been written. The Bible does not hide the faults of its characters. It tells about their strengths, and it tells about their weaknesses. And they did have weaknesses, even the best of them.

God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham, but he had no sooner arrived in the land than he passed right on through. There was a famine in the land, and Abraham went to Egypt. In Genesis chapter twelve, we read, "And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai, his wife, "Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon; therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife, and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house." The providence of God took care of Sarai. He did not allow the matter to go as far as it might have.

Now, Abraham did not entirely lie in the matter. In chapter twenty he explained that Sarai was "the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife." What he told was half true, but I had rather anybody would tell me a whole lie, than a half truth any day. It is easier to spot a whole lie.

Pharaoh was a much more honorable man than Abraham gave him credit for being. When he discovered what Abraham had done, he told him, "Now, therefore, behold thy wife, take her and go thy way." Think about that. Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, was run out of Egypt for lying.

And, more than that, after he left Egypt and arrived in the land of the Philistines, he did the same thing all over again. You would think he would have learned. He placed his wife at risk in Egypt, and then he repeated the same thing with Abimelech, the Philistine king (Gen. 20: 1-18). And again, the king, who had every right to be offended with Abraham, instead, very graciously restored him his wife.

Later, we learn that Isaac did the same thing with regard to his wife, Rebecca

(Gen. 26:6-11). He obviously learned it from his father.

I am sure that I could not do what Abraham did at Mount Moriah with regard to Isaac, but I am also sure that I could not do what he did in Egypt with regard to his wife. Before I would place my wife at risk the way Abraham did Sarai, I am sure I would insist that we just sit down in the desert and starve. I cannot imagine that we could ever get in such distress that I would place my wife in such peril as Abraham did Sarai. It is hard to think of anything more despicable than what Abraham asked of Sarai, and to consider that he might actually go through with it is more than we can imagine.

The simple point is that if salvation is by works, Abraham will never make it. We are running out of people to be saved by works. If Adam and Noah and Abraham and Isaac could not be saved by works, is there anybody who could? We cannot escape the conclusion that if salvation is not by the sovereign, unmerited grace of God, nobody will be saved.

What about Jacob? He was Abraham's grandson. When we speak about the origin of the people of Israel, we generally speak of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. His name means *supplanter*, but God honored him by changing his name to Israel, which means *a prince with God*. We still refer to the people of God as *Spiritual Israel*, and we refer to *National Israel*. His name has been emblazoned across the pages of history as few names ever have. Could Jacob have been saved by works? I don't think so.

The very first thing the Bible records about Jacob is that he attacked his brother. A newborn baby is very limited in his ability to attack anybody, but to the best of his ability, as soon as he was born, Jacob attacked his twin brother Esau. "His hand took hold on Esau's heel" (Gen. 25:26). If you think I am misinter-pretng that action, read the remainder of the Genesis account of the relationship between Jacob and Esau, and see if that entire relationship is not marked by Jacob's mistreatment of his brother.

The name *Jacob* means *supplanter*; it signifies a con-man, a con-artist, a trickster. The name fit. Jacob could not be trusted. He was the sort of man you did not do business with if you could get around it, and if you did trade with him, you made sure to count your change.

Jacob was a homebody; *a plain man dwelling in tents*; he was his mother's favorite. He stayed at home and learned to cook, while his brother Esau was an outdoorsman, a hunter (Gen. 25:27-30). Esau was the favorite of his father Isaac. One day, Esau had been out hunting, and he obviously stayed too long. He enjoyed hunting and he stayed out until he was so hungry he thought he was going to die.

When he finally made it back home, he asked Jacob to "Feed me, I pray thee with that same red pottage, for I am faint" (vs. 30).

We are always hearing about the close relationship between twins, and no doubt, what we have heard is generally true, but Jacob was not at all interested in helping his twin brother. Instead, he asked Esau to sell him his birthright. Esau was the oldest son of Isaac, and the birthright properly belonged to him. In that day there was a great emphasis placed on being the oldest son in the family. There was no greater possession than that birthright, and the oldest son would not readily give it up. How could he relinquish his place as the firstborn in the family, the head of the family? But Jacob would not feed him, unless he agreed to sell his birthright. It did not matter that Esau appeared to be at the point of dying, and that he actually thought he was dying. Esau was his twin brother, but Jacob would not raise his hand to help him; he wanted the birthright. He was a *supplanter*, a con-man, a trickster. He wanted that birthright, and he would use fair means or foul to get it.

In effect, he told his brother, "You can starve for all I care, I will not feed you, unless you sell me your birthright." This was his twin brother who thought he was dying, but Jacob would not raise his hand to help him. Esau was vulnerable, and Jacob intended to take advantage of the situation. Esau agreed to sell the birthright. He said, "Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me (vs. 32)?"

Now, Esau was not innocent in the matter; verse thirty-four says that Esau *despised his birthright*. But I am not on Esau's case; right now we are looking at Jacob.

The name Jacob means *supplanter*. The name fit; Jacob defrauded his brother out of his birthright. It does not matter that Esau failed to place the value he should have placed on the birthright. That did not diminish the guilt of Jacob. Jacob was clearly unfair in his dealings with his twin brother.

Jacob's chicanery did not stop there. Years later, when their father thought he was dying, Isaac sent Esau into the field to "make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die" (ch. 27:4). It was the custom for the father, the patriarch of the family, to pronounce a blessing on the firstborn son just before his death. The blessing belonged to Esau, and Isaac thought the time had come to bestow that blessing.

Their mother Rebekah heard what Isaac said to Esau. She called Jacob and

suggested that he pretend to be Esau, and take the blessing that belonged to his brother (vss 6-10). At first Jacob was not anxious to make the effort. He said, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing" (vss. 11,12). But Rebekah would not be outdone. She provided Jacob with "skins of the kids of goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck" (vs. 16). Now, in his dying state, Isaac could feel of Jacob and not detect the difference.

It is not reasonable to think that Rebekah had time to prepare those skins during the short time that she also prepared a meal for Isaac, and still help Jacob to go in to his father before Esau could return. She had obviously been waiting, and preparing for that opportunity for some time. As soon as Jacob saw how the trick could work, he was more than willing to make the effort. He wanted his brother's blessing all along; he just did not want to get caught.

He took "the savoury meat and the bread which she had prepared," and went in to his father, and told him, "I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me" (vss. 17,19). His father was skeptical; he wanted to know, "How is it that thou has found it so quickly, my son (vs. 20)? Jacob just kept on lying. He said, "Because the Lord thy God hath brought it to me." Jacob was a con-artist; it did not bother him to lie to his old blind daddy.

Isaac said, "Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not (vs. 21). Jacob allowed his father to feel of him to see if he was really Esau. Isaac said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau," and he asked him again, "Art thou my very son Esau?" Jacob assured him that he was.

I have heard it said that you can always spot a liar; a liar cannot look you in the face. But that is not right; that only applies to amateur liars. I have known some liars, who could put on their most honest face, look you squarely in the eye, and lie through their teeth. Jacob was that kind of liar. He had this matter of lying down to an art. He could lie to his old blind daddy, get caught, and lie again, and get caught again, and just keep on lying until his daddy finally believed him.

He could do all of that in order to steal his brother's blessing. He defrauded his brother out of his birthright; then he stole his blessing. I am sure nobody would argue that his deal with Esau with regard to the birthright was fair. If anybody ever took advantage of the vulnerable situation of somebody else, Jacob took advantage of Esau. But, at least, they did make a deal. Esau contributed to his own downfall in the matter of the birthright. But, when it came to the blessing, Jacob did not bother to

make any kind of deal; he just deceived his daddy, and stole the birthright.

The point is that, if salvation is by works, Jacob will never make it. Nobody who lies, and cheats, and steals, the way Jacob did could ever expect to be justified by works. He was one of the most blessed of all characters. He was clearly a child of God. God changed his name to Israel, which means *prince with God*. His name is firmly fixed on the pages of history as few names have ever been. To this day the Jewish people call themselves by his name. We refer to the people of God as *spiritual Israel*. But the record is clear enough: if salvation is by works, Jacob will be lost world without end.

So much for Jacob, what about Moses? It was by the hand of Moses that God delivered to Israel the best system of law any nation ever possessed. We like to talk about the insufficiency of the Law of Moses, and the Law certainly was insufficient to get anybody home to eternal heaven. But, the Law was never intended to save anybody for heaven, in the first place. There have been those who tried to use the Law as an instrument of salvation, but God never intended it for that purpose.

The Law was totally insufficient as a means of saving souls from Hell, but it was entirely sufficient for the purpose for which God intended it. The Law was intended as a system of government for a particular people at a particular time, and it was perfectly suited to that purpose. It was also intended as a system of worship for a particular people at a particular time, and it was perfectly suited for that purpose.

For the purpose for which it was intended, the Law of Moses was the best system of law ever possessed by any nation. How can I wax so bold as to make such a statement? For this reason: God was its author, and you can be sure that whatever God does is the best.

But while Moses was blessed to deliver the system of law that has ever since born his name, not even Moses could be saved by works. Moses was a murderer. He killed a man. Exo. 2:11, 12, "And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand."

I know that somebody may try to justify Moses by claiming that this was a case of justifiable homicide. He saw an Egyptian mistreating one of his Hebrew kinsmen, and he flew into a rage and killed him. If it was not justifiable homicide, it must, at

least, have been something less than cold-blooded, first-degree murder. There must have been some justification for what he did.

But was there any justification? Did Moses fly into a rage, and act on the spur of the moment? No, he did not. Go back and read the text again. Notice that in verse eleven there were three people present. There were Moses, and the Hebrew slave, and the Egyptian, who was smiting the Hebrew. But notice that in verse twelve Moses *looked this way and that way*, and only when he had made certain (or at least he thought he had made certain) there was nobody looking, then *he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand*.

An interval of time had passed. There were only two people present in verse twelve when Moses committed the crime. Moses had plenty of time to consider the matter. He had time to plan what he was going to do, and wait for the best opportunity, and then put his plan into action. Given those facts, any third string lawyer could prove premeditation.

Not only could Moses not gain heaven by works. If his case had been brought to trial, he would have been hard pressed to stay out of the penitentiary.

Let us look at just two more examples. The Bible is very careful to record its characters just as they were. And just as they were, they demonstrated very clearly that not even the most eminent saints could have been saved by works.

David is the foremost Old Testament figure of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is such a clear type of the Lord that it is not always clear whether we are reading about David, the son of Jesse, or the Greater David, the Son of God. He is such a clear figure of Christ that, on at least one occasion, he is referred to as *the Messiah*. II Sam. 23:1 refers to him as *the anointed* of the God of Israel. In the original language, the word that is translated *anointed* is *mashiyach* (Messiah), and it is one of the titles of the Lord. It is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word *christos* (Christ), and of the English word *anointed*. The Holy Spirit was making it entirely clear that he was a type of the Lord.

But David was far from being innocent. David arranged to have Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba killed in order, hopefully, to conceal his own transgression.

Joab, and the armies of Israel were besieging Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonite nation. David remained at home in Jerusalem (II Sam. 11:1). He was walking on the roof of his house; (in that arid land houses had flat roofs) and he saw Bathsheba washing herself. That does not speak very well for her; she should have

been more careful. David sent for her; they sinned, and Bathsheba sent word that she was *with child* (vs. 5). David had Joab to place Uriah in the place where he knew he would be killed in battle.

David was one of the most highly blessed of all characters. The Bible describes him as a man after God's own heart. He was a man who loved God, and feared God. Most of the time he tried very hard to do the right thing, but no man who commits adultery, and arranges for the murder of the husband of his lover could ever expect to gain heaven based on his own goodness. If salvation is not wholly and solely by the sovereign grace of God, David will never make it.

The facts are no different with the apostles. The apostles were honest and good men. They were such men as God was willing to entrust with the gospel. There were such men as God was willing to use in the first planting of the church. But they were just as surely sinners, and just as surely in need of a Savior as anybody else. Without the grace of God not one of them would ever see heaven.

We will look at just one of them. Peter was as close to the Lord as anyone ever was. John thought of himself as the Lord's favorite, and he often referred to himself as the apostle whom the Lord loved. But even though he was, no doubt, entirely sincere in that conviction, he was no closer to the Lord than Peter was. But as close as Peter was to the Lord, and in spite of the great personal affection the Lord had for him, not even Peter could have been saved by works. Peter is like the rest of us; his faults are not hard to find.

For one thing, Peter always had something to say, whether he knew what he was talking about or not. He did not always know what was going on, but that did not usually stop him from talking. In Matthew, chapter seventeen, we read, "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."

That was not what he needed to say. Jesus Christ is Lord. He is due all our devotion. We do not need separate tabernacles for any of the saints, not for Moses, nor Elijah, nor anybody else. Peter would have done well to listen, and that is exactly what God told him. Listen to verse five. "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my

beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

Think of that. God interrupted him before he could finish what he was saying, and told him he needed to listen: "Hear ye him." In other words, "Peter, this is not a time to talk; this is a time to listen." Consider anybody so determined to put in his two cents worth, that God speaks from heaven to let him know that he needs to shut up and listen. And more than that, he lets him know that we do not need three tabernacles. It is Jesus, and Jesus alone, who is God's *beloved son*, and all the honor belongs to him. No doubt, Peter was entirely sincere in the matter, but he was far too quick to speak.

Peter was very much like a child. A child wants to do whatever he sees anybody else do. In Matthew chapter fourteen, the disciples were in a ship "in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves for the wind was contrary." We are told that "in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear." They thought he was a ghost. No doubt, there had been sailors who had drowned in that lake, and they thought the lake was haunted. They believed in ghosts back then too.

"But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Peter had absolutely no need to walk on the water; he just saw the Lord walking on the water, and, like a child, he wanted to try it. His impetuosity got him in trouble on that occasion too, but you already know the rest of the story.

Peter had a terrible temper. He had such a temper that when he got all riled up, you did not want to be within his reach. You probably remember the night when they came to arrest the Lord. "Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.....Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear" John 18:3,10. I never have believed that was exactly what Peter intended to do. The man dodged. Peter meant to take off his head. He did have a violent temper.

In all fairness to Peter, we need to remember that he had promised the Lord that very night that he was willing to die with him, and that is exactly what he thought he was about to do. Matt. 26:34,35, "Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples." When Peter said that, he meant it. He was ready to die with the Lord.

When Peter saw that crowd, he thought the time had come. Peter had no idea he was a match for that entire crowd. When he waded in with his sword swinging, he thought he would very soon fall; he would very soon be dead. How could one man stand against that entire mob. But, before he fell, he intended to take as many of them with him as he could. He would die with his Lord, but he would not die quietly.

But no matter how we may explain his actions, the fact remains; he was impetuous; and it was very common for him to speak, or act, without thinking. Sometimes his quick temper was a danger to those around him.

More than that, it appears that before the Lord called him, he had a foul mouth. The Lord had told him, "This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matt. 26:34). Peter did not think that was right, but it was. Later that night he was challenged three times, and after the third time we read, "Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man" (verse 74). Let me ask you, do you believe cursing and swearing was a brand new experience to Peter that night, or do you believe it was probably an old habit that just came back on him. I am personally convinced that it was an old habit, a habit he had learned to control after he came in contact with the Lord.

I never read that account without calling to mind a story I heard several years ago. I am told that it is a true story. There was a man who had a terrible problem with profanity. It seemed that he could not talk without cursing. It was just a part of his vocabulary. After awhile, somebody invited him to attend church, and he did. He began to attend on a regular basis. Attending church, and hearing the gospel preached in power can have an effect on our lives. He cleaned up his conduct; he cleaned up his language, and finally he asked for a home in the church. He was received, and baptized, and for several years he was a faithful member of the church. Then one night in a rather heated conference meeting he rose to his feet to state his opinion on some subject they were considering, and in the heat of the moment, he lapsed back into his old habit. He came out with some expressions that just shocked that little congregation. No sooner than he had said it, he realized what he had said, and he just dropped down on the seat. He buried his face in his hands, and cried like a whipped child. His weeping shook the pew where he was sitting. Nobody said a word. The entire congregation just sat there, all wide-eyed and slack-jawed. Nobody knew what to say.

When he finally regained his composure, he rose to his feet. His voice was trembling and breaking. He said, "Brethren, you all know what happened. I would not have done it for the world, but what is done is done. Brethren, you know your duty,

you must do your duty." He sat back down.

That little church had a wise old pastor. He said, "The brother is right, we do know our duty," and he said, "Brethren, I have seen enough repentance to satisfy me; I will entertain a motion to accept the brother's acknowledgment."

It appears that is what happened to Peter on that terrible night. But, no matter how we may explain it; the fact remains: nobody who curses and swears, and denies he even knows the Lord could ever expect to be saved by works. Nobody who tries to kill another human being, no matter how convinced he may be that his actions are right, could expect to gain heaven by his own merit.

Brethren, we are running out of possibilities of anybody who might be saved by his own merit. If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob could not be saved by works; if Adam, and Noah, and Moses, and David would not be saved by works; if none of the apostles and prophets could be saved by works, is there anybody who could? No, brethren, the facts are clear; if salvation is not by the sovereign, unmerited grace of God, then nobody will be saved. If God only saves those who deserve to be saved, heaven will be empty.

But we can all thank God that salvation is not based on our accomplishments. Our hope of eternal heaven is based wholly and solely on the grace of God, as it is revealed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Zechariah said that on that grand day, "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it" Zech. 4:7). When we stand before him, we will not say, "Works, works, works." We will not boast of our track record, but rather our cry will be, "Grace, grace, grace; thanks be unto God for his abounding grace."