

“What We Believe about the Work of Christ” (Do vs. Done)

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

April 30, 2017

1. Christ shed His blood as our Representative and Substitute. Romans 2:6 makes it clear that “God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done.’” “God operates with strict...justice, rendering to each person according to what he [or she] has done.”¹ As humans, we appreciate fairness. And God is fair. He must be. The perfection and holiness of His nature allow Him to be nothing else but fair and just. He is good and He must punish evil. He shows no one favoritism and He has no tolerance for any wrong doing. His justice demands death; payment in blood. There is no amount of money or anything else that can pay this debt. He will not look the other way. He will not be fooled or charmed or deceived out of payment in full.

But... He does provide a substitute. Romans 3:21-24 explains the substitution for all who believe: “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” “God can maintain his own justice in justifying sinners ONLY if that justice is satisfied by the righteous death of another. Thus, in the death of Jesus, God substituted himself, thereby demonstrating his own righteousness”² In theological terms, Jesus is the propitiation that appeased God’s wrath against sin and made peace between us and God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 summarizes it nicely: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” When I was a young boy growing up in northern WI at the Lakeland Assembly of God Church, we used to sing an old song that went like this: “He paid a debt He did not owe. I owed a debt I could not pay. I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand-new song: Amazing Grace. Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.”³ John Stott says it well: “[T]he essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be.”⁴

This was foreshadowed by the OT sacrificial system. The person who brought the animal to be sacrificed would lay his hands on the animal as a sign of transferring their sin to it.⁵ The animal was then slain as a vicarious atonement. The animal’s life was substituted for the person’s life. 1 Peter 2:24 teaches us that “[Jesus] himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.” Jesus is our one and only way to God.



2. Christ’s death/resurrection are the ONLY ground for salvation.

There’s just one way to God: Jesus. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) A simple chart that I’ve found helpful is this one:

<u>Human Beliefs:</u>	vs.	<u>The Bible’s Teaching:</u>
Do (enough good things) Religion	vs. vs.	Done (for me by Jesus) Relationship

¹ *Evangelical Convictions: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, p. 121.

² *Evangelical Convictions*, pp. 121-122.

³ © 1977 Ellis J. Crum, Publisher (Admin. by Sacred Selections R.E. Winsett LLC)

⁴ *The Cross of Christ*, Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1986, p. 160.

⁵ See *Evangelical Convictions*, p. 123.

Our Human Beliefs often conflict with the truth of the Bible's teaching. This is why we need to study God's Word and apply it to our lives. There is something in our broken, human condition that makes us feel like we need to do enough good things to dig ourselves out of our own hole. We struggle to fully receive this free gift of grace. It sounds too good to be true and we know we don't deserve it. So, often times, we'd rather earn it. We don't want a hand out. We'd rather pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. This approach to salvation will never work. Isaiah 64:6 says that, "...all our righteous acts are like filthy rags..." We can never do enough good on our own. Now, if we could, then there would be no need for Jesus. He wouldn't have had to go through all that pain and suffering. He wouldn't have needed to substitute Himself in our place. But, the fact is, we do need Jesus. He is our only hope of salvation, for all of the reasons we already talked about today. We must rely on what Jesus has DONE not on what we can DO.

Religion has kept too many of us from a relationship with God. Many religions in our world teach good works. And good works are a good thing to do. But, here's the truth, there is no cosmic scale that measures all your good religious deeds on one side and all your bad sinful behaviors on the other side. Some religions teach things like Karma. The more good you do, the better things will go for you. The more evil you do, the worse your life will be. Due to the idea of causality, you deserve any bad things in your life, because you earned it through Karma. And, it all gets totaled up in the end and impacts your next life, when you'll be reincarnated either upward into something better or downward into something worse (like a Vikings fan! ;). But seriously, this kind of thinking appeals to our human nature and our human way of understanding things. But don't buy into the idea of Karma!



Some religions contain fanatical subgroups that teach things like suicide bombing as the way to salvation. By blowing yourself up for a particular cause, you supposedly bypass all your former sins and buy an immediate ticket to heaven. This is not the way to a relationship with God.

Some religions try to sell us indulgences. Just 500 years ago this was happening in Christian churches. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, "corruption was common in the church's highest offices. Leo X was Pope in Rome... He...tapped the Vatican treasury to support his extravagant lifestyle. When the money ran out, he made use of a fairly new fundraising scheme—selling forgiveness of sins. For a fee, bereaved relatives could get a deceased loved one out of Purgatory. At the right price, they could also save up for their own future sins—sort of a spiritual IRA."⁶



This may sound ludicrous to us today, but it's part of our church history. And even today, we lose track of the key importance of a relationship with God and we lose our way due to religious thinking. Praise God for the Protestant Reformation. Protestants are certainly not perfect, but we were right to protest the idea that money, could somehow pay for sin. No matter who sells an idea like this, we must not let anyone lead us astray.

Religions all around us teach us that salvation is earned through our works. But that's a lie. The God of the universe invites us into a relationship. And the only way to gain that relationship is through Jesus. John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who did receive [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." You see, it's about a relationship. Christ + NOTHING = Christian Faith. We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus alone. He is the only ground we stand on. He is the all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins.

Click on this link to watch a great video that lays out the wonderful Good News about Jesus and His victorious resurrection: <http://www.motionworship.com/6376/mini-movies/the-good-news-of-christ/>

Here's something we dare not miss today: After beginning with Christ alone, we must be careful to continue in Christ alone.

⁶ Read more at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-14/selling-forgiveness-how-money-sparked-protestant.html>

3. Our Christian Faith continues in Christ alone.

Many Christians, after experiencing the beauty of amazing grace, decide to add something else to it. This happened in the early church. The Galatian Christians were considering adding Jewish religious practices to their faith in Jesus. The Apostle Paul scolds them for this fiercely in Galatians 3:1-3, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” A while later, in Galatians 5:4, he writes, “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” The early church was cautioned about adding anything to this equation: Christ + NOTHING = Christian Faith.

It is bad theology to add circumcision, legalism, asceticism or anything else, to our understanding of Christ alone! As Christians, we learn that good works don't save us, but we seem to have this tendency to add them back in. It's almost as if we feel we'd rather be safe than sorry. But adding to Jesus isn't safe at all. In fact, it's very dangerous to lose our firm grip on the one and only thing that truly saves us!⁷ We're not talking here about falling away from God through sinful behavior. We're talking about falling away from God through a system of wrong belief.

What might you be adding to your Christian Faith? Have you added works? Have you added your own set of rules or teachings? Have you added... anything? Or, has shame warped your experience with grace? Are you still wrestling to believe that you are worthy of God's free gift of salvation? “But I'm a Christian now, I need to toe the line and be busy with God's work!” Hum... This is where our works sometimes go sideways. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” If following Jesus constantly feels like heaviness and obligation and tough work, it may be that you are adding a system of works to God's gracious salvation. We were never intended to meet the righteous requirements of God on our own effort. Not before salvation and not after salvation either. We need to rest daily, in God's grace.

Our Heavenly Father did not pull a cosmic bait/switch: “Come to Jesus freely... and then work your fingers to the bone the rest of your life so that you can earn my love!” Have you lost touch with God's grace? Our Christian Faith begins “by grace through faith” and it continues “by grace through faith.” “Pastor Jerry, are you saying our good deeds don't matter?” Well, as I mentioned earlier, this is where our works sometimes go sideways. The Bible is clear about good works: Ephesians 2:10 taught us, “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” James 2:14-17 says, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Therefore, a genuine faith will lead to action. But, not because we need to add anything to what Christ has already done! His work on the cross was sufficient. Our active response of living out the Christian Faith is a good thing. But it is not in order to gain merit or to get on God's good side. It is the genuine, heartfelt response of a love relationship with God. At least, that's what it's meant to be. Our Christian lives are an act of worship flowing naturally and liberally from a love relationship with God.

For example, I could give my wife flowers because that's what I have to do in order for her to love me. But, that's not why I give Debbie flowers. I give them to her because I love



⁷ The Colossian Christians were warned not to add deceptive teachings to their faith in Jesus. Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” Just 2 verses earlier, Col. 2:6, has some great advice, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.” How did we receive Christ Jesus as Lord? (By grace, through faith) How should we continue to live our lives in him? (By grace, through faith) Adding anything to Christ, ruins grace. We need to be cautious that our fragile human hearts don't fall away from being the Grace Community that God intends.

her. When I drive by the flower shop and see the sign, my heart prompts me, "I should get some flowers for Debbie! This would make her so happy and bring such joy to her heart." And, it would bring joy to my heart to watch her receive them. Although, sometimes she cries when I bring her flowers; but I think that might still be a good thing. And, I also enclose a card with the flowers that says...well, you don't need to know what the card to my wife says! But, it says something like "Sweetheart, I got you some flowers just because I love you."

Now... I could approach this differently. Perhaps I drive by the flower store and I see the sign and I feel prompted to get her flowers for another reason. I buy her flowers and I write on the card "Sweetheart, here are some flowers. Now, make sure you make me a nice dinner tonight!" Well, that's something entirely different. (By the way guys, I don't recommend this approach.) That's trying to work to earn her love or control her love. It's responding in my human brokenness with works rather than grace and unconditional love. Relationships are supposed to be about love for one another that's unconditional and free. Our relationship should not be based on what her and I can get each other to do for each other or to buy for each other. If there was something called "Deserved Grace" it wouldn't be Grace. By definition, Grace can't be deserved, because it's unmerited!

God is more interested in a relationship with you than with what you can do for Him. Do you believe that? God is more interested in a relationship with you than with what you can do for Him.

The Apostle Paul articulates this so well in Philippians 3. He knows that his efforts to be good enough on his own are not enough. He knows that the key to the Christian Faith is intimacy with Jesus. Philippians 3:4b-14, "...If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Article 5 of our Statement of Faith reminds us: We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on April 30, 2017 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.