



The Nature of God's Plan

by: Steven J. Wallace

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9).¹

As we are capable of comprehending the nature of the God of universe by looking into the scripture, so we are capable of knowing the nature of the plan that God has given to us. We can see from the scriptures that God is the creator of heaven and earth and all that is in it. We can also see that He created man in His image; unlike anything else created on earth, only man is capable of looking into the will of God to know what God is like and what we are to do to be pleasing to Him. We can see that God is plural in persons and singular in purpose.

“Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah” (Deut 6:4, ASV).

Jehovah, our “Elohim,” is one Jehovah! Jehovah has a plural and singular concept about Him. Jehovah is composed of three divine persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 28:18, 19). Yet they are singular in purpose and establish a platform for unity that we are to emulate. We see plural-singular concepts in various things in the Holy Writ. Marriage is a plural-singular institution. It is composed of a husband and wife who become one flesh and are to be one in purpose (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:22ff; Mal. 2:15). When divorce occurs in a family, sin has occurred somewhere and that which was “one” is now divided into two. God intended the two to remain one (united)

¹ All scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

even as He is (Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:6). The difficulty is not having the ability to know what the will of God is regarding marriage, but rather, the difficulty arises when men are not content with what is written. When we are not content, we replace the word with a wish and that always becomes sin.

The nature of the plan of salvation is also understandable. God's design is that in every single salvation, grace and faith are unified. Without the complete harmony of both, nobody can be saved. Let us analyze some of the words and phrases in Ephesians 2:8, 9 to better understand the nature of God's plan.

“Not Of Works”

Not of works? What works? Not by boastful works, of course. Note the two “nots” in this our passage, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and **that not of yourselves**; it is the gift of God, **not of works, lest anyone should boast.**”

“That” *salvation* is not “of yourselves” nor is it “of works.” Hence, it is not of works that are of yourselves. It is not works that were conceived in the heart *of man* nor begun by him. This salvation originated entirely from heaven. Everything the New Testament tells us to do to be saved began in the mind of God and is accomplished by His will only when our will molds to His.

There are two polarizing extremes that men are attracted to today. One is salvation by “works without faith” by which they may boast of themselves. The other system is salvation by “faith without works.” Neither of these systems will save anyone and yet most of the world is drawn to one or the other. As one who was initially a Catholic, I can personally vouch that their system is of the former. As an infant I was baptized (actually sprinkled) to be saved from sin without my consent, without my

repentance, without my confession, *and without my belief*. There were boastful works involved in my so-called salvation, but saving faith was completely absent from the one who was supposed to be saved. Furthermore, the need to confess sins to a designated person (priest) or the need to memorize repetitious prayers to be saved are all works without the faith (gospel). Praying the rosary with the “Hail Mary,” and “Our Father” is a work “of ourselves” despite the well intentions of the person doing it.

Protestants have raced to the other extreme where they vigorously contend that all are saved by *faith alone*. Not only is this flawed scripturally, but even technically it is broken. If we are saved by “faith alone,” then we must not be saved by grace. “Faith alone” excludes anything else. Yet we are taught by God’s word that grace works through faith; therefore, we cannot be saved by “faith alone.” It is as absurd as one claiming to grow “watermelons alone” and at the same time own a cornfield! This has been so thoroughly developed, defined and defended that many have concluded that nobody can be saved unless Jehovah directly decides to awaken one from spiritual death so that he will believe. Even “faith” is considered by these proponents as a “gift” from God, where God in His sovereignty decides who to give faith to and who to withhold it from. These proponents fail to see that when some don’t get faith

Perhaps Mr. Morris never did read, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Lk. 6:46)? It is amazing that to these people, damnation is a disbelief question, but a person who murders and worships idols can be saved, as long as he also believes! Why? Because “the way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul.” This

(or perhaps get a shipwrecked version of faith like Hymenaeus ,1 Tim. 1:19, 20), that their doctrine necessitates that God is the one who simply chose to not give them a saving faith. It makes a monster and a killer out of our loving and kind God. Some have leaped so far into this persuasion, teaching that nothing a person does can make him saved or lost. Ironically, “faith alone” advocates, actually strip faith from the plan of salvation even as Baptists drive “baptism” away. They deny the very terms they boast in. For example, Sam Morris, a denominational pastor wrote in a tract,

“These and many other Scriptures teach that man’s salvation and the justification of his soul depend entirely upon his faith in Christ. The sin question is a Son question; salvation is a trust question; damnation is a disbelief question. All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger. The justification of the human soul is through the atonement of Christ and not through the efforts of man. The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul” (Former Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Stamford, TX)

clearly identifies the theological cliff that some are willing jump off of to cling to their false doctrine. Any mention of one needing to do something to be saved ends up in a firestorm frenzy where some Protestant “pastors” desire to call down the wrath of God from heaven on all such blasphemous opponents! Accusations are hurled, “You are not trusting in the finished work of

Calvary!” and the like when one insists that there are some things one needs to choose and do to be saved.

Closer to home, it seems evident that some of our brethren have been lapping from the same Protestant punch bowl when they make comments like, “It doesn’t matter if we agree on doctrinal issues as long as we have things in common” or “When it is all said and done, we really are saved by faith alone.” Yes, comments like these have been spoken by supposed gospel preachers! Where did they get such an idea? Obviously, this has not come from a systematic study of the Scriptures, but from the cesspool of Protestant theology.

All of these systems distort the *nature* of God’s plan. The sad result of either of these systems is that whoever holds one has to

the failures of both systems above (see and compare Rom. 4:2 with Jas. 2:21, John 8:39, Rom. 4:12). Paul speaks against the salvation by a system of “works without faith” and James speaks against a system of salvation by “faith without works.” Neither system justifies a person. Hence all passages are complimentary rather than contradictory when we understand that the faith that saves is the faith that obeys (Heb. 5:9).

The Nature of By Grace

How are we saved by grace? The grace of God provides what is impossible for man to provide for himself. One person described “grace” as God giving us what we don’t deserve and “mercy” as God not giving us what we do deserve. There is a lot of truth in that. We see from the scriptures that

“They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham’” (Jn. 8:39)

“and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:12)

“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20)

deny some of the Holy Scripture. Yet interestingly, the Scripture addresses the failures of both in very clear terms and yet, because of the blindness caused either by the traditions of men, or perhaps, the drunkenness of Calvin’s Kool-Aid, this truth remains hidden from their senses. However, one only needs to consider what the Bible teaches regarding Abraham to see

“saved by grace” involves at least two things. One, the grace of God involves the death of Jesus Christ for our sins. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9; see also Rom. 3:24, 25). By the grace of God, Jesus tasted death

for everyone so that we might be redeemed in His blood. Yet while He tasted death for all, only those who are in His church have been purchased (Acts 20:28).

Two, the manifestation of the truth in scripture is by the grace of God. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:11, 12). The grace of God brings salvation and has appeared to all men. How? It appears to all through the Scriptures. The grace of God teaches. How? It teaches through the Scriptures. The revelation of truth is because of the grace of God. This is why we read of the word being referred to as “the word of His grace” (Acts 14:3; 20:32). When we lose sight of the fact that God’s grace conveys teaching, we have a lopsided non-Biblical view of grace.

The Nature of Through Faith

The Holy Spirit tells us in Hebrews 11:6, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Note carefully:

- It is impossible to please God without faith. It is also therefore impossible to not please God with the right kind of faith (Heb. 6:10)!
- Faith *comes* to God.
- Faith *learns* the nature of God (*viz. must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder*).
- Faith *pursues* God, that is, it *diligently seeks Him*.

Faith that diligently pursues the true and living God is saving faith. Yet, this article contends that there is more to being saved

“through faith” and that Paul had more in mind than just the subjective belief.

1. Faith has a source.

“Through Faith” involves a source from which we draw an understanding of God.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16).

The gospel is that source from which faith draws. Hence in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed “from” or “out of” faith (gospel) “into” faith (belief/obedience). Without a well to draw from, the Christian faith would dry up. God has given us that abundant living water in His word. The same type of teaching where the faith (gospel) spawns faith is seen later in Romans, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (10:17). Faith comes by hearing the word of God; and yet the word of God produces faith when heard. That is how out of the faith comes faith. This understanding of faith is sound for the following reasons.

- Without a source for faith there would be no lasting faith, hence, out of the faith springs faith.
- Paul wrote both Ephesians and Romans and had the same understanding in both books.
- The “faith” in Ephesians 2:8 has the definite article in the Greek which lends support that “the Faith” is being understood more than mere subjective faith.
- The gospel is referred to as “the faith” in other scriptures and because of such it grants the plausibility that the gospel is being spoken of in Ephesians 2:8. “But they were hearing only, ‘He who

formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy” (Gal. 1:23, cf. Acts 6:7; 14:22; 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:13). What was Paul preaching when he preached “the faith?” It was nothing other than the one true fixed gospel from heaven (Gal. 1:6-9).

- Subjective faith that is not fully convinced and standing upon the word cannot save. If being saved “through faith” in Ephesians 2:8 implies all subjective faith, then those rebuked with “little faith” would be sufficient (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31). And why not have those who conceal their faith by fear likewise be saved by grace through faith (Jn. 11:42)?

“Through Faith” therefore means more than the subjective. We can only be saved through faith when we are in full compliance with the revealed gospel of God.

2. Faith is alive when we are baptized.

With all of the material discussed above, there is one more component of being saved by grace through faith that needs to be mentioned. Obedience in baptism is the point where grace and faith meet. Previous to our text, Paul wrote,

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **and raised us up together**, and made us sit together in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus**, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-7, emp. mine, sjw).

Paul understood that being saved by grace involved a raising us up and that this raising up placed us in Christ. Yet, this being raised up is also spoken of as faith by the same apostle to a sister congregation.

“**buried with Him in baptism**, in which you also were **raised with Him through faith** in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col. 1:12, emp. mine, sjw).

Ironically, all those who preach we are saved by faith alone, without water baptism are in fact denying both grace and the faith! Early Christians understood that baptism was the meeting place of faith and grace.

- **Clement of Alexandria (150-200 AD)** “Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal. ‘I,’ says he, ‘have said that ye are gods, and all sons of the highest.’ ^[applying Psa. 82:6, sjw]. This work is variously called grace, and illumination, and perfection, and washing: washing, by which we cleanse away our sins; grace, by which the penalties accruing to transgressions are remitted; and illumination, by which that holy light of salvation is beheld, that is, by which we see God clearly.”ⁱ
- **Irenaeus (120-205 AD)** “Thus there are as many schemes of “redemption” as there are teachers of these mystical opinions. And when we come to refute them, we shall show in its fitting-place, that this class of men have been instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God, and thus to a renunciation of the whole faith.”ⁱⁱ

These two quotes are surprising to the modern preacher in the protestant world because these writings decry everything he has ever learned about

baptism. For someone to make the connection that baptism is of grace and not a work of men registers to him as a Jesus-denying anathema. And yet, for the Calvin convert to read of early Christians decrying those who denied baptism as being instigated by Satan and that denying baptism is a denial of the “whole faith” has to be mind melting! What is even more amazing to think of is that Irenaeus was not speaking of the modern protestant movement, although it sounds like he is. Rather, he is condemning a sect of Gnostics. Yes, the denial of baptism in the plan of salvation was a work

put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26, 27, “the faith” is in the original, sjw). The Scriptures identify baptism as the act that places a person into Christ. If one wants to sit with Christ in heavenly places, then one needs to be raised with Him in baptism.

- “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).
- “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:18, 19).



originating with some in the Gnostic movement. They were the heretics who not only denied the Father and the Son, but also denied baptism in its rightful place (1 Jn. 2:22; 2 Jn. 7)! The doctrine that affirms “baptism does not save” is a doctrine that started with those that the apostle John referred to as antichrist, deceivers and liars. Yet today we are considered heretics when we teach “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.”

Finally, we do not deny Christ, the Father, or the faith when we obey the command of baptism and teach others to do so, but rather we affirm Christ as our Lord.

- “For you are all sons of God through [THE] faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have

It is the gift of God

Salvation is the gift of God. It was designed by God. It was accomplished through the work of Christ and is offered for all to partake of. It is apprehended by those who pursue God and seek to please him by obeying the gospel in baptism and continuing to the end in faith. The gift of salvation is seen in various pictures of the Bible. One particular Old Testament passage illustrates it well. Consider Joshua and Jericho.

“Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said to Joshua: ‘See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns

before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him" (Josh. 6:1-5).

If we look at Jericho through Joshua's eyes, we would see a city that is on high alert. The gates are shut and the guard is ready to defend. Yet at the time of this observation, the Lord tells Joshua "See! I have given Jericho into your hand." I am inclined to think there may have been a little humor from the Lord in this statement. For Joshua and the people of Israel, all they could see with their eyes was a city securely "shut up" behind great fortified walls. If they could scale the walls or destroy the gate, they would still have to contend with mighty men of valor. These obstacles were no obstacles for the Lord and only through the eye of faith could Joshua see that Jericho was given into his hand. There is one thing about faith, it allows us to see the unseen and move accordingly. Believing is seeing (Heb. 11:3, 7, 8, etc.). We should also take note that Jericho was a gift; see "I have given Jericho into your hand." Like our salvation today, the gift of God that stood before Joshua did not come without conditions, however. First condition: the men of war were told to march around the city once for six days. Second condition: on the seventh day, they were to march seven times around the city. Third condition: seven priests shall blow seven trumpets on the seventh day. Forth condition: All the people shall shout. These were God's stipulations. It would have been faithless to not march at all or only march on the first day. It would have been faithless and tempting God to blow only six trumpets instead of seven. It would have been

faithless on the part of the people to not shout. These conditions, when met, did not earn anyone Jericho. Had Joshua or the Israelites become hecklers insisting that this constituted "marching salvation," or "trumpet salvation," or worse yet, "shouting salvation," they would have been cut off and destroyed. The walls fell because of grace, yet Jericho was taken through faith. Simply put, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days" (Heb. 12:30). Faith was working when every condition was met. Likewise, we cannot see our salvation with our physical eyes, but it is ours to apprehend by grace through faith when we meet the conditions that God has asked of us. Do you trust God to be baptized into Christ?

ⁱ *The Instructor*, Book 1, chap. 6

ⁱⁱ *Against Heresies*, Book 1, chap. 21