



Does It Matter What Kind Of Person We Are? by Gerald Cowan

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

DOES IT MATTER WHAT KIND OF PERSON WE ARE, AS LONG AS WE BELIEVE IN GOD AND CHRIST?

I don't know that anybody puts it so crassly, but the popular doctrines of "saved by faith alone" and "once you've been saved you're always saved and can't lose it" could be understood to teach that the kind of person you are doesn't matter as long as you're a believer. That may seem to be "a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort" to those who accept it, but it is utter nonsense. A lot of time and space in both old and new testaments of the Bible are used in describing the kind of person God wants everyone to be. How one becomes a "saved" person, accepted into fellowship with God, is of critical importance – by the way, believing or faith alone or even grace and faith alone is not enough – but initial salvation, by whatever means it is achieved, will not keep anyone saved and safe if he does not adhere faithfully to God's prescribed way of life. Let us look more closely at two matters: (1) how to be saved and (2) how to stay saved.

Before continuing here please take the time to read carefully and thoughtfully **Philippians 2:12** and **13**. Notice the emphasis there upon obedient cooperation with God as the means of salvation. We will note and explain later **Ephesians 2:8-9** to answer the ubiquitous argument of "by grace through faith" proponents.

Nobody is saved without the grace of God, but grace alone saves nobody. The common definition of grace endlessly repeated and widely accepted but woefully inadequate is "grace is unmerited favor of God." Attached to that is the idea that grace is not only undeserved but also, necessarily, unconditional and that anything one works for and therefore deserves cannot be called grace. Paul is misquoted to prove the point: If it is works it cannot be grace; if it is grace it cannot be works (**Romans 11:6**). But Paul himself declares that grace is conditional, that there are many things one must do to be eligible for God's grace. The grace of God that brings salvation is offered to all men, but it requires one to deny ungodliness and worldly lust and live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world (**Titus 2:12**) – not only what to do but what to be. Grace is not automatic and unconditional. One must obey from the heart the doctrine or teaching delivered by God before he can be freed from sin and allowed to serve God in righteousness (**Romans 6:17-18**). Here's a better definition of the grace of God that saves: Grace is God empowering us to do what he requires and then doing for us what we need and cannot do for ourselves.

Nobody can be saved without faith (**Mark 16:16** He who does not believe will be condemned; **Hebrews 11:6** Without faith no one can please God, but he who comes to God must believe...). But belief alone saves nobody. Not even belief that God is the only God and that Jesus is the Son of God. Satan and his demons believe that God is

God, although they seem not to accept and yield to His authority. A legion of demons infesting a man cried out, when confronted by Jesus, "What have we to do with thee Jesus, thou Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (**Matthew 8:28-29**; **Luke 8:28-31**). James says:

You believe there is one God: you believe well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? (**James 2:19-20**)

Hearing and knowing the truth will not save one who does not do the things required in the truth (**James 1:22-23, 2:24**). Even believing in God and His Christ is a work of man that man must do for himself (**John 6:29**). One cannot believe for another; one cannot depend upon another to believe for him. One is justified by doing what he believes is the will of God for him. Paul said to Jesus, "Lord what would you have me to do?" (**Acts 9:6**). He professed that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (**Acts 26:19**) – implying that he himself obeyed from the heart the instruction received from the Lord (**Acts 22:16**; **Acts 9:18**; **Romans 6:17**). A man who asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" was told to believe in Christ, but the instruction did not stop with that. When the man believed he was immediately baptized – others of his household following the same example (**Acts 16:31-33**).

Under any covenant one must do whatever he is commanded to do, both initially and continually to the end of his life on earth ("Be faithful unto death and I (Jesus) will give you (then) the crown of (eternal) life" (**Revelation 2:10**)). The requirements are not precisely the same under the old law for the Jews and the new law of Christ one must obey to become Christians. Biblical ignorance advanced, perpetuated, augmented, and glorified by "Reformation Theology," having exploded on the religious scene with Luther, Calvin, and a host of other less notable characters. The design was to declare the human race sinful by descent from the primal parents Adam and Eve, unable to do anything to rescue themselves from the depravity and destruction inherent in humanity and therefore subject to the caprice and whimsy of God who could and would arbitrarily accept and save some while rejecting and condemning all others to destruction. If God saved any, it was by unmerited favor, undeserved grace apart from any action, effort, or even desire on the part of the saved and the undeserved damnation and destruction of helpless and hopeless, even doers of good, among the unsaved. Far from showing a holy God of love, mercy, and impartial justice seeking, desiring, and making possible universal salvation (the Biblical model) it shows an unloving, hateful, unmerciful, prejudiced, unjust and unholy despot who saves some without merit and damns others without personal guilt. I'd say the "Reformation" needs to be abandoned in favor of a Restoration to the Biblical model.

To conclude, let's look again at **Ephesians 2:8-9**. For by grace are you saved through faith ... the gift of God which is not of works, lest anyone should boast. Grace is God's work for us. Faith is our work for ourselves and for God. Grace is God's response to man's need. Faith is man's response to God's grace. It takes both God's grace and man's faith to bring about and secure man's salvation.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS NOT BASED UPON FEELINGS.

Some “feel God working” in their heart and life, or feel a great sense of peace because they have “wrestled with God and gained a victory,” or in some way they have “come to terms with their own humanity.” Some have simply asked God to take control of their lives and believe He has done so, so that whatever they do is acceptable to Him and within His will, otherwise He would prevent it. A common prayer is that God will “take away the love of sinning” and so take one’s load of guilt away. But feelings are no guarantee of validity or reality in one’s relation to God.

A certain man struggled for many years with guilt because of his alcoholism and his many alcohol-related sins. He also struggled with resentment because of birth defects that left his body deformed, deficient and dysfunctional. He blamed God for it, as if God had mistreated him personally, for no fault of his own. He finally found some degree of peace when, as he put it, he “found a concept of God that he could live with.” His concept was of a God who saw him as a whole person in spite of his deformity. That much is certainly true. God does not look at the body but at the soul and spirit, the true heart of the inward person (**1 Samuel 16:7**). His concept was also of a God who accepted his weakness without blaming him for it, who did not hold his sins against him. He based this on **Romans 14:22** and **1 John 3:21**, “If our heart does not condemn us we can be bold toward God.” He concluded that as long as he did not condemn himself, God would not condemn him either. That is a false concept. Sin is not sin because one admits it to be so. Some things are objectively right and wrong. No amount of rationalization will make a wrong thing right. So this man, without repenting his addiction to alcohol, simply trusted that in heaven God would make him able to drink without losing control, or, as he himself put it, “able to handle my booze.” Because he had a sin he did not want to give up, he refused to admit the possibility that there will be no booze or boozers in God’s heaven (**1 Corinthians 5:11**).

I sometimes wonder if most of us are not afflicted with the same flaw, thinking that somehow God will make an exception in our case, that he will let us determine things to suit our own desires. And so we continue to be far from Him even when we “feel very close” to Him.

—-- *Gerald Cowan, Personal Periodicals Number 376, August 20, 2018*