

CHAPTER NINE

THE WAY OF SALVATION— FAITH VERSUS LAW AND WORK

During the past few days, we have seen that all that man has is sin. We have also seen that God accomplishes everything. He has loved us. He has given us grace. God has accomplished righteousness, has caused the Lord Jesus to die and resurrect for us. God has even sent the Holy Spirit to convict and enlighten us and to give us the strength to accept the work of God. Let me ask a very natural question. What must man do to be saved, now that God has finished all His work? God has done everything on His part. Today He has laid this finished work before man. What then is the condition for us to be saved? God has accomplished the work of redemption. How can man now receive salvation? How can redemption become salvation? How can propitiation become substitution? How can God's gift to us in His Son be communicated to us in the Holy Spirit? We are talking about the condition for salvation. What should we do on our side before what is on God's side can be communicated to us?

THE CONDITION FOR SALVATION—FAITH

All those who read the Bible know that the condition for salvation is faith. There is no other condition except faith. Because man has fallen and is corrupted, because his thoughts are crooked, and because man's flesh is of the law, he thinks that he must do something before he can be saved. But the Bible shows us that the only condition for our salvation is faith. Besides faith there is no other condition. The New Testament tells us clearly at least one hundred and fifteen times that when man believes, he is saved, he has eternal life and is justified. When man believes, he has all these things. In addition to these one hundred and fifteen times, the Bible says that man is justified by faith, or becomes righteous through faith, another thirty-five times. In the first instance, we have the verb to believe. In the second instance, we have the noun faith. The verb to believe is used one hundred and fifteen times. Once a man believes, he is saved (Acts 16:31). Once a man believes, he has eternal life (John 3:36). Once a man believes, he is justified. In addition to these verses, there are thirty-five times in which the noun faith is used. Man is saved through faith. He receives eternal life through faith, and he is justified by faith. Hence, in the entire New Testament, at least one hundred and fifty times it says that man is saved, justified, and has eternal life through faith only. It is not a matter of who one is, what one does, or what one can do. Everything depends on believing. Everything depends on faith.

Another thing that deserves special attention is that in all these one hundred and fifty occurrences of faith and believing, no other condition is added. These verses do not say that man must believe and then do something to receive eternal life. They do not say that man must believe and do something before he can be justified. Neither do they say that man must believe and do something before he can be saved. The Lord's Word mentions faith in a clear and definite way. Nothing else is mixed in or attached to the condition of faith. Hence, the Bible shows us clearly from God's point of view that there is no other condition to salvation than to believe.

One of the most well-read and treasured books in the New Testament is the Gospel of John. If one reads it carefully, he will see that John wrote this book with no other purpose than to tell us how man can receive life and be saved and how he can be delivered from condemnation. The Gospel of John mentions eighty-six times that man receives life, is justified, and does not come into condemnation by faith alone and nothing else. Hence, the Bible shows us clearly, adequately, and simply that salvation is not based on who man is, what he has, and what he has done. The Bible shows us that when man believes, he receives (John 1:12). He receives by believing.

We have said that salvation and redemption are accomplished by God. Even the way and plan to accomplish them are laid out by God. We have also seen that grace is accomplished by God through the Lord Jesus. We have to remember that if it is grace on God's side, then it must be faith on our side. If I stretch out my hands to give a brother a cup of tea, he cannot receive it by stretching out his feet. Whatever way others use to give things to you, you have to use the same way to receive them. The way to receive must be the same as the way to give. If others call you on the telephone, then you have to answer by picking up the telephone. If others write a letter to you, you have to receive the letter. The way something is received must be the same as the way it was sent.

According to the Bible, God has given us grace through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:4). For Him to do so is in the principle of grace. Since giving is in the principle of grace on God's side, then receiving is in the principle of faith on our side. Faith and grace are two inseparable principles. Grace is God giving something to us, and faith is our receiving something from God. Faith is nothing other than receiving what God has given us in spirit. This is absolutely independent from work. Only by this way can man receive God's grace. If we resort to any other means, we will not be able to receive God's grace.

Although the Bible shows us that through faith one receives God's grace, many doctrines have emerged as a result of man's misunderstanding. Man comes up with theories that are based on his own thoughts and darkened mind, involving what he should do before he can be saved. Just as man has made idols with his crooked heart and has considered them gods, he has specified conditions for salvation with his crooked heart and darkened thoughts. For this reason, I must point out the different conditions that man has set forth for salvation and consider if these ways of salvation are trustworthy or not. If man does not see God's truth and does not understand His Word, he will not realize that the condition for salvation is faith. But if a man sees God's light and understands God's truth, he will not be able to overturn the New Testament fact that salvation is through faith. The problem today is that after man realizes faith as the condition of salvation, he adds something else to faith. The point of dispute between God and man is not that of believing or not believing, but whether it is believing with repentance, believing with the works of law, believing with baptism, or believing with testifying, as a prerequisite to salvation. The Word of God tells us that once we believe, we are saved. But man today adds a word with. According to his darkened mind, he claims that man is saved by faith with something. What we will consider is not if one can be saved by faith. That matter is settled already. The question today is whether or not faith is enough. Do we need to add with to faith before we can be saved?

SALVATION NOT BEING FAITH WITH THE WORKS OF LAW

The first question is whether man is saved through faith with the keeping of the law. Man's way for salvation is faith plus the keeping of the law. We have spoken concerning the question of the law already, but we will repeat it again. The Bible devotes much time to deal with this question. Preachers, therefore, must also devote much time to deal with this question. Because man pays so much attention to the law, the Bible devotes two books to deal with this problem. We have to know for what purpose God has given the law. God gave the Israelites the law, not for them to keep, but for exposing their sins. Originally, the Israelites had sins, but they had not become transgressions. From Adam to Moses, man had sins (Rom. 5:14), but he did not have any transgressions. God gave the law in order to turn man's sins into transgressions (Rom 5:13, 20a).

How were man's sins turned into transgressions? Suppose there is a person who has the disposition and temperament of walking back and forth outside the meeting hall every day. It is something that he likes to do. He has to do this every day, every week, every month, and every year. No one can explain why he does this. But in his temperament, disposition, and life, there is something that compels him to walk back and forth outside the meeting hall. Although he has such a habit, we cannot say that he has any transgression. You may not like what he does, and you may think that it is wrong, but he has no realization that this is wrong. When will he realize that it is wrong? Suppose you take two bright red ribbons and tie one to each end of the lane. When he comes the next day, he will see the two ribbons and will realize that he should not walk through them. His habit has always been to walk there because something in him compels him to walk there. Suppose he takes a look at the two ribbons and considers the bright color, the silk texture, the nice knots, and then tears them apart and walks right through. In that case, his walking is different from his previous walking. His previous walking was sin without transgression. Now it is the same walking, but he walks in transgression.

God says that the law is perfect. It is good, righteous, holy, and excellent (Rom. 7:12). But man is full of sin. He is full of sin within and without. However, from Adam to Moses, man had no transgressions although he had sin. God established the law, not in order that man would not sin, but in order to expose man's sins and make them transgressions. Today the law is here. Once a person breaks the law, he realizes that he has sinned. Hence, we can say that God gave man the law not for him to keep, but for him to see that he has sinned. When there was no law, he did not realize that he has sin. Now he knows.

The strange thing is that man takes the law, which is there to prove his sin, to try to prove that he is righteous. He turns the law around. God wants us to know through the law that we have sinned, but we want to prove through the law that we are righteous. God wants to show us through the law that we are perishing, but we want to prove through the law that we are saved. Man does not see himself. His thoughts are full of the law. He does not see that he is corrupt inside and cannot keep the law. Man's flesh cannot keep God's law. It will not submit to God's law. However, man still wants to seek out righteousness from the law and earn life through it. God uses the law to show man that he is helpless and that he needs to receive salvation. But when man sees the ordinances, he tries to earn a little righteousness through them and be saved. Romans 3:19 says, "Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may fall under the judgment of God." Here it says that the law was given for the purpose of stopping every mouth, so that no one can say anything, and so that everyone can be subject to the judgment of God. Following this, there is a verdict

concerning us: "Because out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him; for through the law is the clear knowledge of sin" (v. 20). One can see that the original intention of the law was to expose sin; it was not to justify man. It is so clear that the purpose of God's law was to expose sin rather than to establish our own righteousness.

In the Old Testament, not only did God give man the law, He gave man the types as well. These were the ceremonial laws. They explained how to offer up sacrifices and how to pay the money for atonement. These matters typify the Lord Jesus' accomplishment of redemption and its subsequent salvation for us in the New Testament. This is what God has shown us. It is so strange that man would try to establish his own righteousness not only through the law, but also through these types. He tries to establish his righteousness through these ordinances. We even find a Pharisee praying that he fasted twice a week and that he offered to God one tenth of what he had (Luke 18:11-12). He thought that these were his righteousnesses and that through them he could be saved. Man does not see the purpose for which God established the law. He misunderstands God's purpose. Man doubts if it is that easy to be saved. He thinks that it is true that man is indeed saved through believing in the Lord Jesus. We who are Christians all the more acknowledge the need to believe. It is right to believe, but many say that we should also keep the law. What man is saying today is not whether one can be saved through the law or not. What he is saying is that those who believe in Jesus should also keep the law before they can be saved. Faith in Jesus is an undisputed doctrine in the Bible. But Christians say that one should add to that the keeping of the law. Man does not see that to believe in Jesus and to keep the law are two absolutely contradictory things. They can never be joined together. The difference between faith in Jesus and work in the law is the difference between heaven and hell. As heaven is vastly different from hell, so faith in Jesus is vastly different from the work of the law.

To whom was the law given? It was given to the Jews. Why then does the New Testament mention again and again the keeping of the law? In the New Testament, the apostles, or we should say the Holy Spirit, knew clearly that the readers of it may not necessarily all be Jews. Only a minority of those who believed in Jesus at the very beginning were Jews. One person asked me once, "You say that the Jews were the ones to receive the law. But who are the Jews?" I told him that the Jews were like guinea pigs. When a researcher of pharmaceutical products is not sure of a drug, he does not experiment with humans. Instead, he first injects it into guinea pigs. If the guinea pigs die, then the drug cannot be used. Only after the drug is proven effective will it be injected into human beings. The same is done for oral drugs. First, it is taken in by guinea pigs. If it works, then the drug is used. Otherwise it is discarded. The same is done for immunization against bacteria. If it works on guinea pigs, it will work on man. If it does not work on guinea pigs, it will not work on man. I would say in a most respectful way that the Jews are the guinea pigs. God tried out the law on the Jews. If the Jews could make it, then it could be used. If they could not make it, then it cannot be used. God did try the law on the Jews, and they did not make it. This means that the whole world cannot make it. The Jews were selected by God as objects of an experiment. The Jews are representative of the whole world. Hence, one sees that the law was officially given to the Jews. But the principle of the law is given to all men. It is given to all flesh. God gave man the law to forewarn him that man is of the flesh and is fleshly.

What is Christianity? Christianity does not tell the sons of Adam to do good. That is not Christianity. Christianity says that Adam has been crucified and removed and that the Adamic

race has been annihilated through the cross of the Lord Jesus. Man in Christ receives a new life and becomes a new race. The law is useless for the new race, for there is no such thing as law in the new race. The law was given by God to the sons of Adam to expose their sins. If one wants to be saved through keeping the law, he has to realize the serious consequence of the phrase keeping the law. Once man keeps the law, he will have righteousness. But this righteousness would be of the flesh. In other words, it would mean that the sons of Adam, that is, the Adamic race, need not die. It would mean that man can please God with his flesh. Perhaps one would argue that he does not mean to keep the whole law, that he realizes that it is impossible to keep the whole law, that what he means is to believe in Jesus and then keep the law. But if the work of the law has a millionth fraction of ground before God, it means that Adam did not have to die. This would revoke the very nature of Christianity. Christianity is not here to establish a ground for Adam. It is not here to maintain the old creation. It is here to transfer us to the new creation. We are of the flesh, and we cannot obtain the righteousness that comes from the keeping of the law.

Since the fall of man, the cherubim and the flaming sword were guarding the tree of life in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Why were the cherubim and the flaming sword guarding the way to the tree of life? It was to prevent man from eating of the tree of life. After man became a sinner and had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, there was no other way for him to go back to the tree of life and eat of its fruit except through the judgment of the cherubim and the slaying of the flaming sword. God shows us that man cannot eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and at the same time eat of the fruit of the tree of life. Man cannot eat of both. Man cannot receive the seed of sin on the one hand and take in the Lord's salvation on the other hand.

Here lies the difference between Christianity and Judaism. Judaism says to the man in the flesh that in keeping the law he shall live. But Christianity says he cannot live, for he cannot keep the law. Christianity asserts clearly that man cannot do this. There is no possibility for him to keep the law. Hence, we can see that in the Old Testament, God gave the law for man to keep. In the New Testament, we see that man cannot keep the law at all, nor does he have to keep it. This is one of the greatest truths in the Bible. Now there is a danger of mixing faith and the law together, and annulling the principle of the Bible. Right away, Adam will have the ground, and the fleshly man will be able to live again. God's judgment is that man must die. Through Jesus Christ, God has removed man. He does not want the fleshly man to come up with anything. If man still tries to produce something from the flesh, he has overturned the principle of the New Testament. If the law is given some ground, then the flesh also will have some ground. But God says that the flesh has no ground, that all grounds have been removed.

We may wonder whether this is to annul the law. Please remember that according to the Bible, the law requires two things from us. First, the law says that he who keeps it shall live (Rom. 10:5). The law demands us to keep and to do something. Once man keeps it, he will have righteousness. If we have righteousness, we will have the reward, which is life. But there is a second aspect. The law says that the day we eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we shall surely die (Gen. 2:17). On the one hand, the law requires man to keep something. On the other hand, its punishment is death for all

those who do not keep the law. All who do not keep the law receive the recompense of not keeping the law. Hence, in the Old Testament, in principle, we see that the law required man to keep it and to be righteous. Those who did not keep it were condemned and punished.

In Shanghai, the traffic department has many traffic regulations. For example, to ride after dark, one has to have lights on his bicycle. If there is no light for the bicycle, then there will be a fine of sixty cents. This regulation requires two things: it requires man to install a light, and it requires those who do not do this to be punished. What then is to annul the law? To annul the law means that one does not need a light, and he does not have to be punished. What is to keep the law? To keep the law is to meet either of the two requirements. For those who have a light, they are keeping the law. For those who do not have a light, but are willing to pay sixty cents, they are also keeping the law.

The problem today is that we cannot keep the law. The law of God requires that we be righteous. If we are not righteous, then we fail. Only by being righteous can we live. But no man of the flesh is able to keep the law. None among us can have righteousness before God through keeping the law. Once man touches God's law, he will fail. Paul said in Romans 7:7 that even if God has only one law, man is not able to keep it. Paul did not transgress all the laws. He mentioned only one law, the one concerning covetousness. In the original language, covetousness is lust. Paul said, "I am helpless. The lust keeps coming back again and again. It is impossible for me not to have lust." He could not get the light of his bicycle to work, yet he had to travel in the city. For some, the problem is not that the light does not work. For them, they simply do not want to have the light. These people do not even want to light the lamp. What is annulling the law? It is when someone pleads with God saying, "O God, I cannot keep Your law today. Please let me go on account of the Lord Jesus. I have done my best. Please do not punish me." All who plead for the Lord Jesus to be lenient or for God to have mercy on them are annulling the law. On the one hand, they do not want to keep the law. On the other hand, they do not want the punishment of the law. They do not want to have a light. Yet at the same time, they want to avoid the fine of sixty cents. What about us today? Do we have our lights today? If we have the lights, then we can travel peacefully in the city. But none of us are able to have the light. Hence, the only way is to pay the sixty cents. This is what the Lord Jesus has done for us. This is the judgment that we have borne in Christ. We have to say, "Praise and thank the Lord that we are already judged in Christ!" We have been punished in Christ. God has punished us in Christ. Since the Lord Jesus has died, resurrected, and ascended, the salvation we receive now is equivalent to what we would obtain if we keep the law. The ones who have the light are free. The ones who have been punished are also free. Today if a man keeps all the laws, he will be justified and will be saved in the same way that we who have believed in Jesus are saved and justified. Of course, we are not just saved when we believe in Jesus; in saving us, the Lord Jesus grants us many other things apart from the law as well.

Paul said in Romans 3:31, "Do we then make the law of no effect through faith? Absolutely not! Rather, we establish the law." Hence, when we are saved through faith in Jesus, we have not made the law of no effect. Since we have met the requirement of the law in us, the law has nothing to say. Never think that we should add the work of the law

to our faith. For us to believe is like paying the sixty cents. For us to keep the law is like having the light. No one in the whole world would have the light and pay sixty cents at the same time. This is unreasonable. Why does one have to pay sixty cents and at the same time have the light? If he is able to have the light, then he does not have to pay the sixty cents. If there is the word of faith, then there cannot be the law. If there is the law, there cannot be the word of faith. No one can have faith and keep the law at the same time, for to do so would be to despise the Lord Jesus. It would mean that one fails to see his utter weakness and filthiness.

Please read again Galatians 2:16-17: "And knowing that a man is not justified out of works of law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, we also have believed into Christ Jesus that we might be justified out of faith in Christ and not out of the works of law, because out of the works of law no flesh will be justified. But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves also have been found sinners, is then Christ a minister of sin? Absolutely not!" The book of Galatians shows us that some in Galatia contended that even though man was justified through faith in the Lord Jesus, it was not enough; he still had to keep the law. They were not saying that a man should not believe. They recognized that a man was justified in Christ. But they were saying that one still needed to keep the law. Paul said a very strong word here. He said that if while seeking to be justified in Christ we have been found sinners, it meant that after we have believed in the Lord Jesus, we are still not justified, that we are still sinners, and must still keep the law before we can be saved. For example, suppose that I am sick, and I spend ten days with one doctor. Afterwards, because the sickness is still present, I have to consult another doctor. If I seek to be justified in Christ, and at the same time try to keep the law, it means that I am still a sinner and have not yet been saved. If I am no longer a sinner, then I should not need to keep the law anymore. If I am still a sinner, is Christ a minister of sin? Paul asked that if he was not justified after he had believed in the Lord Jesus, did that mean that Christ is a minister of sin? The answer is, "Absolutely not!" In the New Testament, Paul said "absolutely not" many times. In Greek, it is an idiom. It is translated in the King James Version as "God forbid." It is equivalent to the expression "heaven forbid," a very strong word. This means that even heaven would reject this. There is no reason under the sun that this should be so. Hence, one can see that a man cannot have faith in Jesus and at the same time keep the law.

In Romans 3, Paul made another clear statement. Verse 28 says, "For we account that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." This is a conclusive statement. Now it is a matter of faith. It has absolutely nothing to do with the law. Thank the Lord. Jesus is enough. When the Bible pays attention to faith, it pays attention to God's grace. This shows us that everything comes by receiving. Some like to exalt men in their gospel preaching. But if we know the Bible, we will see that apart from God, man is absolutely helpless. Please remember these two sentences: man is not saved by the law, and neither is he saved by faith with the law. This is the first and most common mistake of man. Man has mixed faith with the law.

SALVATION NOT BEING FAITH WITH GOOD WORKS

"The works of law" is an expression we find in the Bible (Gal. 2:16). We have covered this aspect already. A more common understanding of the condition of salvation is that salvation is

by faith and also by works. Salvation by faith is a doctrine of the Bible, and man cannot argue against it (Eph. 2:8). But man says that it is also by works. Let us now consider what the Bible says about this. We are often polite and accommodating in our speaking, but the Bible is not polite in its speaking. It is very definite. Ephesians 2:8 and 9 say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast." These verses tell us that salvation is absolutely by grace and through faith. The word through means to traverse. It is like saying that the electric light shines by electricity and through the wire. It is also like saying the water from the faucet comes by the reservoir in the water department and through the pipes. Man is saved by grace, but the channel through which salvation comes to us is faith. The channel is not works but faith. It is through faith and has nothing to do with works. It is not adding faith to works. One has to know that faith and works are basically opposed to one another. The grace of the Lord Jesus is based on the love of God. When we believe, grace and love flow into us. As a result, we are saved, have life, and are justified. None of the above are communicated to us through works.

Thank the Lord that salvation is not because of work. Why should it be so? The answer here is that no one should boast. What Ephesians 1 tells us is that God wants to have all the glory. That is why He does all the work. Suppose a certain brother is very capable and educated and has suffered much for the Lord. If another brother comes to me and says, "Brother Nee, I praise you and glorify you for the fine work that this brother has done," we would surely say that he is mentally ill. Glory can only go to the one who has done the work. There is no such thing in the world as one working and another getting the glory. Those who work deserve the wages. Whosoever works, the same should get the glory. Why has God done all the work of saving us? It is so that He would get all the glory. The reason God gave us grace is that He would get all the glory. He does not want us to work, lest we boast in ourselves. To boast is to glorify oneself. If we have done anything that deserves any glory, we will not thank and praise God before Him. Right away we will say, "No doubt, the salvation is given to me by You. It is Your work. But I have added my part to it. If I had not added my part, I would not be like I am today." Man loves to overestimate his own merits. He likes to overemphasize his own outstanding points. If God said that He would accomplish ninety-nine percent of the work of salvation and leave one percent to us, this one percent would silence the heavens. The angels would not praise anymore, and the stones would not cry out anymore. Instead of the stones becoming the sons of Abraham, the sons of Abraham would become the stones, for out of the one hundred percent, some would lay claim to one percent. They would then tell the wonder of their own work and say, "I passed through that in this way, or in that way. How did you get through? What contribution did you put in?" Everyone would be boasting about his own work, and God would have no possibility of getting the glory.

Thank and praise the Lord! Since He wants to get all the glory, He did not leave one thing for us to do. When we reach heaven, we will have to say that we are still helpless persons. We are able to get there because of "free" grace. This word "free" will stop all supplication in heaven and will fill it with thanksgiving and praise. It will be all thanksgiving and praise because everything is done by God. We have to see that this is the truth of the Bible. Man's work and God's grace cannot be mixed together. Once man works, it comes into conflict with glory. Hence, whether I am on the street, at my home, or in a Lord's table meeting, I can say from my heart, "God, I thank and praise You, because I have nothing to do with my salvation. My salvation comes one

hundred percent from You. Therefore, what can I do except praise You?" God delights in praise. The Bible calls one kind of prayer loathsome, but the Bible never calls any kind of praise loathsome. Some prayers are rejected by God, but God never rejects any praise. God wants to have all the glory, for He has done all the work.

Does that mean that we can be loose and do not need to do good anymore? Ephesians 2:10 explains, "For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them." Verses 8 and 9 show us what God has done for us objectively. Verse 10 immediately shows us the subjective matters. God has not saved us in a foolish way. He has given us a new life, a new nature, and a new spirit within. The Lord Jesus is living in us through the Holy Spirit and has prepared us for all good works. Please remember that God has not included these good works in the previous two verses. It does not matter how many good works you do after you are saved. Salvation is still of grace. It does not matter how fast you advance spiritually, for salvation is still of the free grace of the Lord Jesus. Even if you have a work like Paul's, a result like Peter's, a love like John's, and a suffering like James's—even if you have all of these four things—you are still saved through free grace. In the future, while your work can show that you are saved, it is never your condition for salvation. My faith does not mean much. It is only a receiving of God's work.

Man is not saved by works. No one can argue against this. But man is very pitiful. Because his heart is darkened and filled with sin, because his flesh is wicked and full of the law, although he recognizes faith, he presumes that he should add works also. Man does not see that works come after he is saved by faith. Salvation has nothing to do with works. I am not saying that we do not need works. We do pay attention to work. But this is not the condition for salvation. Salvation is an altogether different problem. One must not forget that the Bible says that if we pay but a little attention to work, God's grace is annulled (Gal. 2:21). Since it is grace, it must be of faith only and not of work.

Romans 4:4 and 5 say, "Now to the one who works, his wages are not accounted according to grace, but according to what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted as righteousness." Now we are clear. If a man can be saved by works, then salvation becomes a reward. It is no longer grace, but something that one deserves. If it is something that one deserves, then it is no longer free. The word freely in the Bible (3:24) means in the original language without a cause. In other words, there is no reason for it. The Lord Jesus said in the Gospel of John that "they hated Me without cause" (15:25). In the original language, it can mean, "They hated Me freely." The Lord never spent anything to buy that hatred, but they hated Him just the same. There was no reason attached. It was free. God's grace during those three and a half years was accomplished freely for us.

We are like the younger son in Luke 15. One day we came to God and said, "God, give me the share of the estate that falls to me." God gave us what we should have. After we took our estate, we squandered it with evil companions. Today we have come back to the Father's house. The robe, the ring, and the shoes that we wear and the fatted calf that we eat are not what we deserve. That which was rightfully ours has been spent. We do not

deserve the ring. We do not deserve the robe. We do not deserve to eat the fatted calf, and we do not deserve to wear the shoes. What then is grace? When those who do not deserve to be saved are saved, that is grace. Grace is what those who should not obtain have obtained. What the younger son took away the first time was not grace. He spent that already. What he received the second time was all grace. His own portion was long spent. When he enjoys another meal at home, it is not what he deserves to get; it is the Father's grace.

Hence, if one works, the question of wages comes in, and it is no more grace. Grace is in conflict with what one deserves. How then does faith work? When it is not work or labor, but only faith in the God who justifies the sinner, that faith is reckoned as righteousness. This is the relationship between faith and grace. If it is work, then it is not grace. If it is grace, then there is only faith. To believe is to accept what God has done. It is not how much I have done. We must emphasize that, before God, we are not justified by what we have done. We are justified by faith. Today we have justification by faith. Therefore, the question of work is forever over.

Everyone who knows me well knows that I like soy sauce. It is all right if there are not many dishes at the table. As long as I have soy sauce, I can get by. At one time, one who was serving me saw that my soy sauce was almost gone. He went to the market and brought more back. Then he mixed it in with the good soy sauce. When I tasted it, I noticed that the taste was different. I asked why the soy sauce tasted different that day. I checked with the serving one whether or not he had poured the soy sauce from the same bottle. He answered yes. I wondered if my taste had changed. It did not seem that likely. I then asked if he had mixed it with something else. He had to admit that he had. Today man does the same thing to God's work and His grace. He tries to mix something else into them. Once we mix something in this way, grace is no longer grace. That is why God says that if it is of grace, then it is no more of work (Rom. 11:6). If it is of work, then it is no more of grace. Work can never be mixed with grace. Hence, we must not merely say that salvation is of faith. We must say that salvation is solely of faith.

I love Romans 3:27. This word is based on verses 25 and 26 which speak of how the Lord Jesus has become a propitiation place and how God has justified those who believe in Him. It is not unrighteous for God to do this. Hence, in verse 27 it says, "Where then is boasting? It is excluded." There is no way for us to boast. There is no possibility to boast anymore. The next sentence is very important. It says, "Through what kind of law?" This means that we have nothing to boast of anymore. By what way are we excluded from boasting? By what principle are we excluded from boasting? Verse 27 continues, "That of works? No, but through the law of faith." Paul asked how man can be excluded from boasting and how boasting can be removed. His answer is by the principle of faith. If one is in the principle of faith, then he is not in the principle of works. If it is by the principle of works, then boasting cannot be excluded. But thank the Lord. Today we have the principle of faith. Hence, we cannot boast. We can only praise.

Philippians 2:12 says, "So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Many have told us that Paul said explicitly in Philippians that we

have to work out our own salvation. If we are to work out our salvation, does that not mean that we have to do something? Is it true that the Lord has done the work, but man also has to do something? This is like saying that He supplies the material, we supply the labor, and the two of us work out our salvation. A person says this because he does not understand the word of the Bible. If we are to work out our salvation, then what has the Lord Jesus done on the cross? What has He accomplished on the cross? If a thing has been accomplished, it cannot be accomplished any further. If you are a child of God, you cannot become a child of God again. On the cross, the Lord Jesus clearly said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). The cross of the Lord Jesus has accomplished the work of salvation. It has accomplished the work of redemption. Since the work of salvation and redemption have been accomplished, there is no possibility for us to work out this salvation. If we still want to work out our salvation, we must first overturn the work of the Lord on the cross. We must declare that the work of the Lord Jesus has not been accomplished; the Lord's work has not been finished. That is why we have to work it out.

Many times, we do not know what it means to shame others. But once you have experienced it, you will know what it is. For example, here is a sister. Someone has asked her to wash some handkerchiefs. After she has washed them, she hangs them up to dry. But another person comes along and takes the handkerchiefs away. When she asks for the reason, she is told that they were taken down to be washed. This is an open shame to the sister, for it means that the other person does not believe that the handkerchiefs are washed. It means that they think that the sister has lied. In the same way, for us to work out our salvation is not a glory to Christ but a shame to Christ. The Bible says clearly that Christ has accomplished all the work.

Then why does Philippians 2:12 say that we have to work out our salvation? The word work out in the original language carries the meaning of out. We should work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Did Paul's word stop here? If it had stopped here, we would not know what he meant. Verse 13 says, "For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." Since God has operated in you, it is possible for you to now work it out. If God has not operated in, we have no way to work it out. Since God has operated in, you can work out. God has already saved you within and has given you life. Now there is no other way but to let Him come out. God does not want you to work. He wants you to work out. Hence, this is not a question of salvation or perdition, eternal life or eternal death. This is a question of whether or not one receives the reward after his salvation. God has already operated in you, causing you to will and to work for His good pleasure. Hence, you have to work it out. This is the proper condition of a Christian. In other words, this is your work after salvation. If a man has not yet been saved, he cannot work out his salvation. If a man does not have life, he cannot live out a life. Only after a man has been saved can he work out his salvation. Hence, one sees that there is no such thing as being saved through good works.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ETERNAL LIFE AND THE KINGDOM

There is one thing we have to be clear about. To have eternal life is different from entering the kingdom of the heavens. Whoever cannot see the difference between eternal life and the

kingdom of the heavens will never be clear concerning the way of salvation and the way of preservation. The Lord Jesus said that from John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens is taken by violence (Matt. 11:12). The violent take it. The law and the prophecies of the prophets ended with John (11:12-13). Based on this word, some have said that we must be violent, that is, we must strive before we can be saved. If we do not strive, we will not be saved. A person says this because he cannot tell the difference between the kingdom of the heavens and eternal life. There is a difference between eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens.

The first difference between eternal life and the kingdom lies in time. Eternal life is for eternity, but the kingdom is not for eternity. When the new heaven and the new earth come, the kingdom of the heavens will be over. The kingdom of the heavens denotes God's rule. The period of God's rule is the period of the kingdom of the heavens. God's sovereignty on earth and His rule on earth will be manifested for only one thousand years. What are the heavens? The book of Daniel talks about the ruling of the heavens (7:27). Hence, the kingdom of the heavens is the sphere in which the heavens rule. When the Lord Jesus comes to rule on earth, that will be the time when the heavens rule. Today the ruling one on earth is the devil, Satan. The worldly politics and authorities today are of Satan. The Lord Jesus will not rule until the time of the kingdom of the heavens. But the period during which the authority of the heavens is realized is very short. First Corinthians 15:24 says, "Then the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to His God and Father, once He has abolished all rule and all authority and power." The kingdom will be delivered up to God the Father. Hence, there is a time limit to the kingdom. But eternal life is forever. Everyone who reads 1 Corinthians 15 knows that at the beginning of the new heaven and the new earth, that is, at the conclusion of the millennium, the kingdom will be delivered up. Hence, there is a difference in time between eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens.

The second difference lies in the method that man enters the kingdom of the heavens and the way he obtains eternal life. The receiving of eternal life is the subject of the entire Gospel of John. The way to have eternal life is by believing. Once we believe, we obtain. We never read of another way. But to enter into the kingdom of the heavens is not a simple matter. The entire Gospel of Matthew mentions the kingdom of the heavens thirty-two times. Not once does it say that the kingdom of the heavens is received by faith. How does a man gain the kingdom of the heavens? Matthew 7:21 says, "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens." One can see that the entry into the kingdom of the heavens is a question of work rather than of faith. Matthew 5:3 also tells us, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." Here it does not say eternal life but the kingdom of the heavens. To have the kingdom of the heavens, one needs to be poor in spirit. The Lord also says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (v. 10). One does not have to be persecuted to receive eternal life, but the kingdom is for those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Even if a man has eternal life, if he has not been persecuted for the sake of righteousness today and is not poor in spirit, he may still have no share in the kingdom.

There is a third difference. It lies in the attitude Christians should have concerning eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens. Concerning eternal life, God has never told us to seek after it. Rather, every time it is mentioned, He shows us that we have it

already. However, concerning the kingdom, the word of the Bible says that we have to seek after it and pursue it diligently. Today, concerning the kingdom, we are in the stage of pursuit; we have not obtained it yet. We still have to put forth the effort to seek and pursue after the kingdom.

The fourth difference lies in the way God treats the kingdom and eternal life. God treats eternal life as a gift; it is given to us (Rom. 6:23). One never sees a person going to the Lord to seek for eternal life. There is not such a thing, because eternal life is free grace; it is given through the Lord Jesus to all those who believe in Him. There is no difference between a seeking one and one who is not seeking. But the kingdom is not the same. One recalls the mother of the two sons of Zebedee coming to the Lord Jesus and wishing that the Lord would cause her two sons to sit on both sides of Him in the kingdom (Matt. 20:21). But the Lord Jesus said, "To sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father" (v. 23). Grace is obtained once we call on Him. But the kingdom depends on whether one can be baptized in His baptism and drink the cup which He drank. Both of the disciples said that they could. But the Lord said that even though they promised that they would and could, the matter is still not up to Him to decide. The Father is the One who gives.

Furthermore, the criminal who was crucified along with the Lord said to Him, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Did the Lord Jesus hear his prayer? Indeed, He did. But He did not grant his request. The criminal asked the Lord to remember him when the Lord receives the kingdom. The Lord Jesus did not answer him that he would be with Him in the kingdom. Rather, He answered him, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (v. 43). The Lord did not answer his question concerning the kingdom. But He did give him a reply concerning Paradise. As long as we call on Him, we can go to Paradise. But it is not so simple to go into the kingdom. Hence, there is a big difference here. God's attitude toward eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens is different: one is the gift of God, and the other is the reward of God.

Concerning the difference between the kingdom of the heavens and eternal life, there are other passages in the Bible which are quite interesting. Now we come to the fifth difference. Revelation 20 shows us that the martyrs receive the kingdom, although it does not say that they are the only ones who receive the kingdom (v. 4). The Bible, however, never shows us that man must be martyred to receive eternal life. If that were the case, Christianity would become a religion of death, for then man must die. But one does not see such a thing. However, the kingdom is different. The kingdom requires striving. It even takes martyrdom to obtain the kingdom. For example, poverty is a necessary condition for the kingdom of the heavens. In order to obtain the kingdom of the heavens, one has to lose his riches. The Bible shows us clearly that no person on earth who is rich according to his own ways can enter into the kingdom of the heavens. We cannot say that no rich man can be saved. We cannot say that no one can enter into eternal life who would not lose his riches. Inasmuch as it is difficult for the camel to go through the eye of the needle, in the same way it is difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 19:24). But have you heard that inasmuch as it is impossible for the camel to go through the eye of the needle, in the same way it is impossible for a rich man to be saved and have eternal life? Thank the Lord. The poor

can be saved. So can the rich. The poor can inherit eternal life. So can the rich. But to enter into the kingdom of the heavens is a problem for the rich. If we accumulate wealth on earth, we will not be able to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Of course, this does not mean that one has to give up all of his money today. I am saying that one has to hand over all his money to the Lord. We are only the stewards. We are not the master of the house. The Bible never recognizes a Christian as the master of his money. Everyone is but a steward of money that is for the Lord. All of us are but the Lord's stewards. There is such a condition for entering the kingdom.

There is another very peculiar thing. One never sees the questions of marriage and family come into play involving the matter of eternal life. But the Gospel of Matthew says that some will not marry for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens. Some even made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 19:12). In order to enter into the kingdom of the heavens, and in order to gain a place in the kingdom, they choose to remain virgins. One does not see a married person being denied eternal life. If such were the case, Peter would have been the first one to have a problem, for he had a mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14). We see that the question of eternal life is not related to family and marriage at all, but the question of the kingdom is very much related to the family and marriage. This is why the Bible says that those who have wives should be like those who had none. Those who use the world should be as those not using it, and those who buy should be as those who do not possess (1 Cor. 7:29-31). This has much to do with our position in the kingdom of the heavens.

Finally, we have to mention another difference. In the kingdom, there are different levels of rank. Even if men are able to enter into the kingdom, there is a difference in the position that they hold there. Some will receive ten cities, and others will receive five (Luke 19:17-19). Some will merely receive reward, but others will receive great reward. Some will gain a rich entrance into the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:11). Some will enter the kingdom without a rich entrance. Hence, there is a difference in rank in the kingdom. But there is never a question of rank regarding eternal life. Eternal life is the same for everyone. One will not receive ten years more than another. There is no difference in eternal life, but there is a difference in the kingdom.

If one would consider a little, he will realize that in the Bible, the kingdom and eternal life are two absolutely different things. The condition for salvation is faith in the Lord. Other than faith, there is no other condition, for all the conditions have been met by the Son of God already. His Son's death has met all of God's requirements. But to enter the kingdom of the heavens is another matter; it requires works. Today a man is saved by God's righteousness. But we cannot enter the kingdom of the heavens unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). The righteousness in one's living and conduct must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees before he can enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Hence, one sees that the question of eternal life is completely based on the Lord Jesus. But the question of the kingdom is based on man's works. I am not saying that the kingdom is better than eternal life. But God has a place for both.