

November 28, 2021

The Crux of the Matter

To the Ephesians

"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. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

"...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

"You were taught, with regard for your former way of life, to put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self..."

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Ephesians 1-6

In his letter to the church at Ephesus the Apostle Paul continues to follow those same threads that run through all of his writings. He begins with the foundation of the gospel which is always his primary teaching. ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith..."*** he says.

Our salvation through God's grace which he has already given is the core of everything Christian, and yet it is one of the most difficult concepts for believers to fully comprehend. It is, it seems, really challenging for us to accept that salvation is God's gift to us which we cannot earn through anything we do.

Thus, since the Apostle wrote those words, ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast"*** believers have sought to add works back into salvation.

To understand that our only response to the grace of God which allowed Jesus to provide the innocent sacrifice of atonement for our sins must be founded in our faithful acceptance of that grace. To suggest that we can somehow earn that salvation by our own good works makes the death of Jesus on the cross totally unnecessary.

As we have already observed however, that same grace-based salvation that we accept in simple faith also demands that we lay down our own sin-filled lives and the ***"flesh"*** which drives those demands. So, Paul will remind the believers in Ephesus that he has already taught them that they must ***"...put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self..."*** Here again is the Apostle explaining that only reasonable response to God's overwhelming grace is our complete surrender of that ***"flesh"*** and its inherent drive to survive to the God of heaven.

As is common in much of his writing Paul will apply this idea of putting off our ***"...old self..."*** by applying it to the specific challenges facing the congregations to whom he writes. For the Corinthians it was the need to understand what Christ-centered love is. For the Ephesian believers it is the challenges of maintaining unity in relationships which is, after all, the perfect reflection of God's nature in us.

The Apostle will write, ***"Be completely humble and gentle; patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of***

peace” showing believers for all time that this is a key element of our worthy response to God's grace. He will go on to explain that this unity is the product of our selfless willingness to **“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”** Paul's call to guard our unity flows from Jesus' final prayer for all believers that **“... all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me.** (John 17:20-21)

