

Salvation by Grace - How It Works

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God has always condescended to allowing His truth to be put into stories that we can understand. Such stories - analogies, allegories and parables - shed light on the truth contained in the story. To explain the invisible aspects of the spiritual and to approach an apprehension of the mysteries of the Unexplainable, one must resort to these devices - and then explain how the story applies to the truth. Grasping the truth of salvation is one such mystery.

A modern invention makes for a wonderful parable: the automobile. Say a person wanted to travel from Los Angeles to a small farm at the northern tip of Maine. Theoretically, one could walk or travel in other ways from L.A. to Maine - and this is precisely where spiritual reality is different from physical reality and this analogy to our spiritual journey to heaven breaks down. No amount of self-effort or human ability can transport our souls to heaven. But while "With men this is impossible..., with God all things are possible." (Mt. 19:26)

But let's look in on our stranded would-be traveler in L.A. He sincerely desires to make the journey and is quite willing to forsake the dead-end, worldly life of the city. But he has no means to get to Maine - nor does he even really know which way is east! But he calls on his Dad and his Dad meets his needs. He gives our traveler a car, a road map, an expense account and even provides a Driver to get him to Maine.

The car is a beauty, the road map is excellent (if our traveler actually reads and follows the directions), the expense account is inexhaustible (though limited to necessary items and expenses for the trip), and the Driver is an expert extremely knowledgeable about traveling and particularly about these roads. What more could one ask for?

Well, how about oil, gas and water for the engine? And food for our traveler seems rather necessary. The expense account is there, but if the traveler won't stop at the gas stations and restaurants along the way, an unplanned stop is soon to happen - or else our traveler will arrive in Maine much thinner and much less healthy than when he left L.A.

Now keep in mind, this Driver is a gentleman. He won't insist on driving the car. So if our traveler insists on taking the wheel but fails to heed warning signals - either from the car, the map or the Driver - then our traveler is to blame.

Also keep in mind that, in addition to the avoidable obstacles and problems, there are potholes and other motorists about who might not prove to be avoidable. So there are some things that just having the car, map, expense account and Driver just don't accomplish - one still must make the journey.

There are some who teach salvation by works. In this parable, that would be comparable to our traveler attempting to walk to Maine or to buy his own car or somehow secure a bus, train or plane ticket to Maine or even sticking his thumb out to flag down another motorist. Though such an attempt would be physically possible for healthy, virile and resourceful travelers, spiritually, salvation is available to *any and all* who believe - not just the strong, healthy, morally good and stubborn few. Again, this is a chief limitation in this story. Using other methods to get to the destination doesn't mean you get to stay once you arrive. (see Mt. 7:21-23; 22:10-14)

Then there are some who teach salvation by grace - which is very true. In this analogy, that would mean that our traveler gets in the vehicle and stays with the vehicle all the way. As already stated, our traveler could use other methods to get to Maine. But let us say that a place of permanent residence awaits our traveler in Maine but only on condition that he travel by and remain with that

car and Driver for the entire trip and we approach closer to the truth.

But let's look at what that means. One cannot remain in L.A. and travel to Maine at the same time. Nor can one remain worldly or remain self-centered and be saved at the same time. (Jas. 4:4; Lk. 9:23)

In addition, our traveler must submit to the map and Driver for directions and rely upon the expense account for provision. If our traveler fails to do this, his journey to Maine is no longer a journey to Maine but a journey to somewhere else. Similarly, we must read and obey God's Word, obey the leadings of His Spirit and trust in God's keeping and enabling power or our journey to heaven becomes a fruitless, deceived journey to somewhere else.

If we truly do get in the "car" our Father has provided for us, our lifestyle will change from darkness to light, confusion to understanding, doubt to faith, self-worship to loving obedience to God. If those changes are not progressively taking place in our life - just as our motorist recognizes strange noises from the engine or that the signs on the road say he's headed in some direction other than east - we need to stop the car, get back in the passenger seat and obey our Instructor in all things. Anything less is not really God's grace - it is the modern and postmodern apostasy that robs men of their souls and of their eternal life with God.

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