

# What Think Ye of Salvation by Grace?

BRUCE R. MCCONKIE

I think I'll take as a text what we just sang:

*Glory to God on high!  
Let heav'n and earth reply;  
Praise ye his name!  
His love and grace adore,  
Who all our sorrows bore;  
Sing aloud evermore,  
Worthy the Lamb!*

[James Allen, "Glory to God on High," *Hymns* no. 44]

I wonder how many of us are aware of one of the great religious phenomena of the ages, one that is now sweeping through Protestant Christianity, as only one other thing has ever done in the whole Christian Era.

We are silent witnesses of an almost worldwide religious craze that had its birth in the minds of a few great religious reformers nearly five hundred years ago and which is now receiving a new birth of freedom and influence.

May I divorce myself for a moment from the mainstream of present-day evangelical Christianity, swim upstream as it were, and give forth some rather plain and pointed expression on this supposedly marvelous means of being saved with very slight effort.

## The Original Heresy

But before zeroing in on this religious mania that has now taken possession of millions of devout but deluded people, and as a means of keeping all things in perspective, let me first identify the original heresy that did more than anything else to destroy the primitive Christianity.

This first and chief heresy of a now fallen and decadent Christianity—and truly it is the father of all heresies—swept through all of the congregations of true believers in the early centuries of the Christian Era; it pertained then and pertains now to the nature and kind of being that God is.

It was the doctrine, adapted from Gnosticism, that changed Christianity from the religion in which men worshipped a personal God, in whose image man is made, into the religion in which men worshipped a spirit essence called the Trinity. This new God, no longer a personal

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Father, no longer a personage of tabernacle, became an incomprehensible three-in-one spirit essence that filled the immensity of space.

The adoption of this false doctrine about God effectively destroyed the true worship among men and ushered in the age of universal apostasy. The dominant church then became a political power, ruling autocratically over kingdoms and empires as well as over her own congregations. Salvation, as was then supposed, was administered by the church through the seven sacraments.

### **The Second Greatest Heresy**

Nearly a millennium and a half later, during the sixteenth century, as the Reformation grew out of the Renaissance, as a means of breaking the hold of the dominant church, the great Christian reformers lit a new doctrinal fire. That fire, burning wildly over the dry and arid prairies of religious autocracy, is what really prepared the way for the restoration of the gospel in modern times.

It was nonetheless the doctrinal fire—the burning, flaming, heretical fire—that became the second greatest heresy of Christendom, because it effectively destroyed the efficacy and power of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ by whom salvation comes.

The first great heresy, sweeping like a prairie fire through the struggling branches of a newly born Christianity, destroyed the worship of the true God. And the second, a heresy originating in the same courts of darkness, destroyed that very atonement of God's only Son.

This second heresy—and it is the delusion and mania that prevails to this day in the great evangelical body of Protestantism—is the doctrine that we are justified by faith alone, without the works of the law. It is the doctrine that we are saved by grace alone, without works. It is the doctrine that we may be born again simply by confessing the Lord Jesus with our lips while we continue to live in our sins.

We have all listened to sermons by the great revivalists and self-appointed prophets of the various radio and television ministries. Whatever the subjects of their sermons may be, they always end with an invitation and a plea for people to come forward and confess the Lord Jesus and receive the cleansing power of his blood.

Television broadcasts of these sermons always show arenas or coliseums or stadiums filled with people, scores and hundreds and thousands of whom go forward to make their confessions, to become born-again Christians, to be saved with all they suppose this includes.

While driving along a highway in my car, I was listening to the radio sermon of one of these evangelists who was preaching of salvation by grace alone. He said all anyone had to do to be saved was to believe in Christ and perform an affirmative act of confession.

Among other things he said: "If you are traveling in a car, simply reach forth your hand and touch your car radio, thus making contact with me, and then say, 'Lord Jesus, I believe,' and you will be saved."

Unfortunately, I did not accept his generous invitation to gain instant salvation; and so I suppose my opportunity is lost forever!

Interwoven with this concept is the doctrine that the elect of God are predestined to be saved regardless of any act on their part, which, as I suppose, is part of the reason a Lutheran minister once said to me: "I was saved two thousand years ago, and there is nothing I can do about it one way or the other now," meaning that he thought he was saved by the blood of Christ shed on Calvary, without any works or effort on his part.

### **The Example of Martin Luther**

Here is an account of how Martin Luther himself came to believe the doctrine of justification by faith alone; it is an ideal illustration of why this doctrine has such wide appeal.

A friendly biographer tells us: Luther “was much concerned about his personal salvation and given to gloomy reflections over his sinful condition,” so much so that “he fell dangerously ill, and was seized with a fit of despair.” Also:

*No one surpassed him in prayer, fasting, night watches, self-mortification. He was . . . a model of sanctity. But . . . he found no peace and rest in all his pious exercises. . . . He saw sin everywhere. . . . He could not trust in God as a reconciled Father, as a God of love and mercy, but trembled before him, as a God of wrath, as a consuming fire. . . . It was sin as an all-perovading power and vitiating principle, sin as a corruption of nature, sin as an alienation from God and hostility to God that weighed on his mind like an incubus and brought him to the brink of despair.*

While in this state, he gained

*the conviction that the sinner is justified by faith alone, without the works of the law. . . . This experience acted like a new revelation on Luther. It shed light upon the whole Bible and made it to him a book of life and comfort. He felt relieved of the terrible load of guilt by an act of free grace. He was led out of the dark prison house of self-inflicted penance into the daylight and fresh air of God’s redeeming love. Justification broke the fetters of legalistic slavery, and filled him with the joy and peace of the state of adoption; it opened to him the very gates of heaven. [Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, pp. 111, 116–17, 122–24]*

So says Luther’s biographer.

It should be perfectly clear to all of us that Luther’s break with Catholicism was part of the divine program; it came as an Elias preparing the way for the Restoration. But this does not in any sense put a stamp of divine approval on the doctrine he devised to justify the break in his own mind.

### **A Modern-Day Example**

I received a letter from a returned missionary whom I shall call Elder Carnalus Luciferno, for no one in his right mind would have such a name, and my correspondent was certainly out of his mind.

His letter told me of his own conversion, of his service as a zone leader in the mission field, and of making many converts. But after returning home, as he expressed it, “I returned to my old Gentile ways.”

After thus ceasing to be a true Saint, and becoming a genuine Gentile, he met some representatives of another church who taught him that we are saved by grace, without works, simply by believing in the Lord Jesus.

Thereupon he was saved, and his letter, which he sent to many people, was an invitation to these others to believe in Christ and be saved as he was saved.

Later I said to his mission president, “Tell me about Elder Carnalus Luciferno.”

“Oh,” he said, “Elder Carnalus Luciferno was a good missionary who made many converts. But since returning home he has been excommunicated.”

“Oh,” I said. “What was his problem?”

The mission president replied, “Before he joined the Church, he was a homosexual, and we understood that since his release he has reverted to his old ways.”

### **The Strait and Narrow Way**

Now, let us reason together on this matter of being saved without the need to do the works of righteousness. Did you ever wonder why our missionaries convert one of a city and two of a family while the preachers of this doctrine of salvation by grace alone gain millions of converts?

Does it seem strange to you that we wear out our lives in bringing one soul unto Christ, that we may have joy with him in the kingdom of the Father, while our evangelist colleagues

cannot even count their converts so great is their number?

Why are those who come to hear the message of the Restoration numbered in the hundreds *and* thousands, rather than in the hundreds of thousands?

May I suggest that the difference is between the strait and narrow way, which few find, and the broad way, “that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Matthew 7:13–14).

All men must have and do have some way of worship—call it what you will—be it Christianity or Communism or Buddhism or atheism, or the wandering ways of Islam. I repeat: All men must and do worship; this inclination is given them by their Creator as a natural gift and endowment. The Light of Christ is shed forth upon all mankind; all men have a conscience and know by instinct the difference between good and evil; it is inherent in the human personality to seek and worship a divine being of some sort.

As we are aware, since the Fall all men have become carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature; they have become worldly; and their inclination is to live after the manner of the flesh and satisfy their lusts and appetites.

Accordingly, anytime men can devise a system of worship that will let them continue to live after the manner of the world, to live in their carnal and fallen state, and at the same time one which will satisfy their innate and instinctive desires to worship, such, to them, is a marvelous achievement.

### **Salvation by Grace**

Now, there is a true doctrine of salvation by grace—a salvation by grace alone and without works, as the scriptures say. To understand this doctrine we must define our terms as they are defined in holy writ.

1. *What is salvation?* It is both immortality and eternal life. It is an inheritance in the highest heaven of the celestial world. It consists of

the fullness of the glory of the Father and is reserved for those for whom the family unity continues in eternity. Those who are saved become as God is and live as he lives.

2. *What is the plan of salvation?* It is the system ordained by the Father to enable his spirit children to advance and progress and become like him. It consists of three great and eternal verities—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—without any of which there could be no salvation.

3. *What is the grace of God?* It is his mercy, his love, and his condescension—all manifest for the benefit and blessing of his children, all operating to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

We rejoice in the heavenly condescension that enabled Mary to become “the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh” (1 Nephi 11:18).

We bask in the eternal love that sent the Only Begotten into the world “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

We are profoundly grateful for that mercy which endureth forever and through which salvation is offered to erring mortals.

4. *Does salvation come by grace, or grace alone, by grace without works?* It surely does, without any question in all its parts, types, kinds, and degrees.

We are saved by grace, without works; it is a gift of God. How else could it come?

In his goodness and grace the great God ordained and established the plan of salvation. No works on our part were required.

In his goodness and grace he created this earth and all that is on it, with man as the crowning creature of his creating—without which creation his spirit children could not obtain immortality and eternal life. No works on our part were required.

In his goodness and grace he provided for the Fall of man, thus bringing mortality and death and a probationary estate into being—

without all of which there would be no immortality and eternal life. And again no works on our part were required.

In his goodness and grace—and this above all—he gave his Only Begotten Son to ransom man and all life from the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the Fall of Adam.

He sent his Son to redeem mankind, to atone for the sins of the world, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). And again all this comes to us as a free gift and without works.

There is nothing any man could do to create himself. This was the work of the Lord God.

Nor did we have any part in the Fall of man, without which there could be no salvation. The Lord provided the way, and Adam and Eve put the system into operation.

And finally, there neither has been, nor is, nor ever can be any way nor means by which man alone can, or any power he possesses, redeem himself.

We cannot resurrect ourselves anymore than we can create ourselves. We cannot create a heavenly abode for the Saints, nor make provision for the continuation of the family unit in eternity, nor bring salvation and exaltation into being. All these things are ordained and established by that God who is the Father of us all. And they all came into being and are made available to us, as free gifts, without works, because of the infinite goodness and grace of Him whose children we are.

Truly, there is no way to overstate the goodness and grandeurs and glories of the grace of God which bringeth salvation. Such wondrous love, such unending mercy, such infinite compassion and condescension—all these can come only from the Eternal God who lives in eternal life and who desires all of his children to live as he lives and be inheritors of eternal life.

### **Teaching in the Early Church**

Knowing these things, as did Paul and our fellow apostles of old, let us put ourselves in their position. What words shall we choose, to offer to the world the blessings of a freely given atoning sacrifice?

On the one hand, we are preaching to Jews who, in their lost and fallen state, have rejected their Messiah and who believe that they are saved by the works and performances of the Mosaic law.

On the other and, we are preaching to pagans—Romans, Greeks, those in every nation—who know nothing whatever about the Messianic word, or of the need for a Redeemer, or of the working out of the infinite and eternal atonement. They worship idols, the forces of nature, the heavenly bodies, or whatever suits their fancy. As with the Jews, they assume that this or that sacrifice or appeasing act will please the Deity of their choice and some vague and unspecified blessings will result.

Can either the Jews or the pagans be left to assume that the works they do will save them? Or must they forget their little groveling acts of petty worship, gain faith in Christ, and rely on the cleansing power of his blood for salvation?

They must be taught faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and to forsake their traditions and performances. Surely we must tell them they cannot be saved by the works they are doing, for man cannot save himself. Instead they must turn to Christ and rely on his merits and mercy and grace.

### **Teaching by Abinadi**

Abinadi struggled with this same problem in his contentions with the priests and people of Noah. They had the law of Moses, with its various rites and performances, but they knew nothing of the Atoning One. And so Abinadi asked, “Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye? And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses” (Mosiah 12:31).

After teaching them some of the great truths of salvation, Abinadi answered his own question: “Salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses” (Mosiah 13:28). Salvation is not in works—not even in those revealed of God—but in Christ and his atonement.

### **Modern-day Teaching**

Now let us suppose a modern-day case. Suppose we have the scriptures, the gospel, the priesthood, the Church, the ordinances, the organization, even the keys of the kingdom—everything that now is down to the last jot and tittle—and yet there is no atonement of Christ. What then? Can we be saved? Will all our good works save us? Will we be rewarded for all our righteousness?

Most assuredly we will not. We are not saved by works alone, no matter how good; we are saved because God sent his Son to shed his blood in Gethsemane and on Calvary that all through him might ransomed be. We are saved by the blood of Christ.

To paraphrase Abinadi: “Salvation doth not come by the Church alone: and were it not for the atonement, given by the grace of God as a free gift, all men must unavoidably perish, and this notwithstanding the Church and all that appertains to it.”

Let us now come to the matter of whether we must do something to gain the blessings of the atonement in our lives. And we find the answer written in words of fire and emblazoned across the whole heavens; we hear a voice speaking with the sound of ten thousand trumpets; the very heavens and the earth are moved out of their place so powerful is the word that goes forth. It is the message that neither men, nor angels, nor the Gods themselves can proclaim with an undue emphasis.

This is the word: Man cannot be saved by grace alone; as the Lord lives, he must keep the commandments; he must work the works of righteousness; he must work out his salvation with fear and trembling before the Lord; he must have faith like the ancients—the faith that brings with it gifts and signs and miracles.

### **“Ye Must Press Forward”**

Does it suffice to believe and be baptized without more? The answer is, No, in every language and tongue. Rather, after belief, after repentance, after baptism,

*Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.*

*And now, behold, . . . this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.* [2 Nephi 31:20–21]

John, the beloved apostle, promises the Saints eternal life with the Father on this condition,

*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* [1 John 1:7]

The blood of Christ was shed as a free gift of wondrous grace, but the Saints are cleansed by the blood after they keep the commandments.

Nowhere has this ever been taught better than in these words of the risen Lord to his Nephite brethren:

*And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.*

*Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.*

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do;*

*Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day. [3 Nephi 27:19–22]*

Men must be doers of the word, not hearers only; they must do the very works that Christ did; and those who have true and saving faith in him accomplish this very end.

#### **Our Day's Need: Correct Interpretation**

In our day, among other Christians at least, we are not faced with the problems of our predecessors. They had to show that any works then being performed were of no avail without the atonement, that salvation was in Christ and his spilt blood, and that all men must come unto him to be saved.

Our need in today's world, in which Christians assume there was an atonement, is to interpret the scriptures properly and to call upon men to keep the commandments so as to become worthy of the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb.

Hear, then, the word of the Lord Jesus:

*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. [Matthew 7:21]*

And it is the will of the Father—as a thousand scriptures attest—that all men everywhere must endure to the end, must keep the commandments, must work out their salvation with fear and trembling before the Lord, or

they can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

How well Nephi said,

*Believe in Christ, and . . . be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. [2 Nephi 25:23]*

#### **Gospel Call to Righteousness**

Salvation by grace alone and without works, as it is taught in large segments of Christendom today, is akin to what Lucifer proposed in preexistence—that he would save all mankind and one soul should not be lost. He would save them without agency, without works, without any act on their part.

As with the proposal of Lucifer in the preexistence to save all mankind, so with the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, without works, as it is taught in modern Christendom—both concepts are false. There is no salvation in either of them. They both come from the same source; they are not of God.

We believe and proclaim that it is life eternal to know the only wise and true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Let men worship whomsoever they will, but there is no salvation in worshipping any God but the true God.

We believe and proclaim that salvation is in Christ, in his gospel, in his atoning sacrifice. We are bold to say it comes by the goodness and grace of the Father and the Son. No people on earth praise the Lord with greater faith and fervor than we do because of this goodness and grace.

As the Lord's agents, as his servants, as ambassadors of Christ—sent by him, sent to speak in his place instead, sent to say what he would say if he personally were here—we testify that no man, as long as the earth shall stand, or the heavens endure, or God continues as God, no man shall ever be saved in the kingdom of God, in the celestial kingdom of heaven, without doing the works of righteousness.

As far as man is concerned, the great and eternal plan of salvation is:

1. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; faith in him as the Son of God; faith in him as the Savior and Redeemer who shed his blood for us in Gethsemane and on Calvary;
2. Repentance of all our sins—thus forsaking the world and its carnal course; thus turning from the broad way that leads to destruction; thus preparing for the spiritual rebirth into the kingdom of God;
3. Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; baptism under the hands of a legal administrator who has power to bind on earth and seal in heaven—thus planting our feet firmly on the strait and narrow path leading to eternal life;
4. Receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost—thus enabling us to be baptized with fire; to have sin and evil burned out of our souls as though by fire; to be sanctified so as to stand pure and spotless before the Lord at the last day; and
5. Enduring to the end in righteousness, keeping the commandments, and living by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.

Thus saith the Lord:

*He who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. [D&C 59:23]*

As God is true, and Christ is the Savior, and the Holy Ghost is their minister and witness, such is the plan of salvation, and there neither is nor ever shall be any other.

Let those in the world think and act as they please; let us, the Saints of God who know better, together with all who are willing to live by the higher standard of the gospel, praise the Lord for his goodness and grace and do so by keeping his commandments, thereby becoming heirs of eternal salvation.

*Glory to God on high!  
Let heav'n and earth reply;  
Praise ye his name.  
His love and grace adore,  
Who all our sorrows bore;  
Sing aloud evermore,  
Worthy the Lamb!  
[Hymns, no. 44]*

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.