

Comments on Various Disputed Passages - Ephesians 2:8

Written by Michael Gowens

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Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

Eph 2:1-10 is a regeneration passage. Eph 2:8 is often quoted as a proof text for the idea that man's exercise of faith is the instrument of salvation. The following brief article is an attempt to explain the meaning of the phrase "through faith" in this verse, particularly in regard to the role of faith in salvation.

The first thing that needs to be said about it is that the verse does not say "through believing" (a verb) but "through faith" (a noun). The verse does not support the popular idea known as "decisional regeneration" – a view that necessarily makes man's act of believing the condition or prerequisite of salvation. Holy Scripture, on the contrary, teaches clearly that belief is an evidence, not a cause, of spiritual birth (Joh 5:24; 1:11-13; 1Jo 5:1).

Then, what is the relationship between faith and regeneration? It will help you to remember a very basic fact: Faith is always a response to God. In fact, to be more specific, faith is a response to the stimulus of Divine revelation. When God speaks, faith responds.

In Scripture, faith is depicted as both a voluntary and an involuntary response to God. Just as the human body consists of various systems, some of which respond voluntarily and some involuntarily to the stimuli of brain impulses, so faith is sometimes a conscious response to God, and sometimes it is a response to God below the level of consciousness. The "faith" in Ephesians 2:8 is an involuntary response, below the level of conscious decision.

This verse describes the initial gift of faith in regeneration. When the Lord Jesus Christ speaks the life-giving voice to one who is dead in trespasses and sins (Joh 5:25), He creates faith in the soul by the sheer power of His command, so that the sinner irresistibly responds to His effectual call. The sinner is "made willing in the day of [God's] power" (Ps 110:3). Like Lazarus, he responds to the Divine imperative involuntarily – below the level of consciousness. The power that raise Jesus from the dead is the very same power that creates faith in the soul (Eph 1:19).

This initial gift of faith by which God creates the response He requires is a necessary prerequisite to the voluntary (#i.e. conscious and deliberate) response to God's word that we call "gospel faith." Until a person has been given the gift of faith in regeneration, in other words,

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he cannot believe. The flip side of this truth is that there is no greater evidence of spiritual birth than a true evangelical faith.

This distinction between an involuntary and a voluntary response will help you to make sense of the fact that faith is described in the Bible as both a grace (Eph 2:8) and a duty (1Jo 3:23). Think on these things.