

FAITH IS NOT A GIFT!

Since *touto* refers to the previous phrase *te gar chariti este sesosmenoi dia tes pisteos* (“for by grace you have been saved through faith”), *Theou to doron* (“the gift of God”) is salvation. God gives everlasting life, by grace, to the one who believes in Christ. *Theou* (“of God”) is placed first here for emphasis and to create a contrast with *ouk ex hymon* (“not of yourselves”). Grace is not a gift, it is the *basis* of the gift. Faith is not a gift, it is the means by which the gift is received. Salvation is the gift. Hoehner writes: “This salvation does not have its source in man (it is ‘not from yourselves’), but rather, its source is God’s grace, for ‘it is the gift of God.’”

Scripture does not seem to support the idea that faith is a gift from God. The Bible simply calls upon people to believe. One example is in Romans 4. Here Paul cites Abraham as one who was declared righteous by God on the basis of faith and not works (4:1-3). In verse five Paul writes, “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, *his faith* is accounted for righteousness” (emphasis added). The personal faith of the one who does not work but only believes is what results in justification. There is no intimation that this faith is anything other than his own personal faith.

Another example is in John 11. In verses 25-26, Jesus addresses Martha and says, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” In 11:27, Martha responds: by saying, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” In the interplay of the words of Jesus and Martha there is not the slightest hint that her faith is anything but her own conviction concerning the words of Jesus. There is a simple response of “Yes ... I believe” to a simple question, “Do you believe this?”

The fact that faith is a personal response on the part of people must be balanced with the fact that God is sovereign. The Bible clearly teaches that God convicts men of their need for salvation:

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven (Matt 16:17).

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up the last day (John 6:44).

Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father (John 6:65).

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged (John 16: 8-11).

But as has been shown, the Bible also clearly *exhorts* individuals to believe. The fact that God convicts people of their need of a Savior and reveals to them the truth concerning Christ is not the same thing as saying that He gives them their faith. In commenting on Eph 2:8, Chafer writes:

The point in the verse is that salvation is by grace in its totality... Though it is true that faith on the part of an unsaved person would be impossible apart from divine help, it nevertheless is a human decision, however difficult it may be to separate the human work from the divine work. The problem with making faith a particular gift from God is that it removes from man any responsibility to believe and leaves it entirely in the hands of God. If this were true it would be useless to exhort men to believe inasmuch as they could not do so.

The relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man is an age-old question and one that is a paradox from a human point of view. God convicts people of their need to be justified. He discloses to them the truth of the person of Christ. But “the convicting work of the Spirit in itself does not assure salvation.” Individuals must believe. Ephesians 2:8 simply states that when a person believes in Jesus Christ, he receives the free gift of salvation.

Eadie concludes:

Men are saved by grace. . . and that salvation which has its origin in grace is not won from God, nor is it wrung from Him; “His is the gift.” Look at salvation in its origin—it is “by grace.” Look at it in its reception—it is “through faith.” Look at it in its manner of conferment—it is a “gift.” For faith, though an indispensable instrument does not merit salvation as a reward; and grace operating only through faith, does not suit itself to congruous worth, nor single it out as its sole recipient. Salvation, in its broadest sense, is God’s gift.

IV. Conclusion

Ephesians 2:8 is a magnificent statement concerning the eternal salvation which is graciously provided by God through the medium of faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not a divine gift from God. Faith is a personal conviction which a person exercises when he or she encounters Jesus the Christ. The clear exhortation from Paul and the other NT writers is for people to believe. There is no biblical data to warrant the belief that faith itself is given by God. Robertson correctly concludes, “‘Grace’ is God’s part, ‘faith’ ours.” God provides the free gift of salvation on the basis of His grace. People must receive the free gift of salvation by means of faith. Such is the clear and distinct message of Eph 2:8.

<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1994i/J12-94c.htm>
IS FAITH A GIFT? A STUDY OF EPHESIANS 2:8
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