

Romans

I. The Role of the Believer

A. Romans 8:12-17 . . . So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— [13] for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. [15] For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" [16] The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

B. Prayer

II. The response of the Believer to the role of the Holy Spirit

A. Romans 8:12 . . . So then, brethren, we are under obligation (*a debtor*), not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

1. The word "obligation" can be used synonymously with the word "debtor," and it speaks of a single act or course of action to which we are morally or legally bound.
 - a. The kind of obligation spoken of here in vs 12 is the result of making a promise or vow, or entering into a contract (*covenant*) and giving an oath – usually in response to some kindness or favor someone has done for us. In either case, be it a promise/vow or contract/oath obligation, it includes mutually understood conditions related to fulfilling or failing to fulfill the obligation.
 - b. In other words, when we accept God's gracious gift of salvation through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, we are also accepting the obligation to live according to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit.
2. Therefore, once we repent and trust in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, and are redeemed from the enslaving power of sin, baptized, and given the Holy Spirit, we then have an obligation to fulfill, or a debt to pay, to Him who purchased us with His own blood (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:18-19), and made us His possession (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9).

3. Now I want to point out that Paul starts by stating what we are not obligated to rather than what we are obligated to.
 - a. And regardless of his reasons, his method drives home the truth that we no longer have any obligation or duty to gratify our flesh with its sinful passions, or to serve our old master, sin.
 - b. Paul stated this same truth in Romans 6:20, where he said, “When we were slaves of sin, we were free in regard to righteousness.” In other words, when we were serving sin, we had no duty or obligation to obey righteousness, because it was not our master. But now that righteousness is our master, we are obligated to serve it rather than sin, because sin is no longer our master.

- B. Romans 8:13 . . . for IF you are living according to the flesh, you MUST die; but IF by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you WILL live. This single verse contains a principle and conundrum that I want us to examine.

- C. The Principle: We must die to live. Death must precede life.
 1. This is a fundamental principle of the Christian life, and it directly applies to godly living and living with God. For example, we must die to self and sin in this life to live godly in this life, and we must die to self and sin in this life to live with God forever.
 2. Paul has already addressed the issue of dying to self and sin now in order to live a godly life now, in Romans 6:4-7, “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. [5] For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, [6] knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; [7] for he who has died is freed from sin.”
 3. Jesus addressed the issue of dying to self and sin now in order to live forever with God, in Luke 9:23-24, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. [24] For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”
 4. And again Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies,

it bears much fruit. [25] He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal” (John 12:24-25).

5. Therefore, according to this principle, we can either intentionally die now, or we will die later. The only way to godly living in this world and eternal life in the next is through the door of death.
- D. The Conundrum: This verse makes a statement about eternal salvation that appears contrary to, or at least somewhat in conflict with the more popular Protestant salvation theology. Let me explain.
1. According to the current and most common Protestant teaching on salvation, we are saved by grace, through faith, plus nothing. The grace is spoken of as God’s unconditional gift of mercy unto eternal life. The faith as believing that Jesus died for your sins and accepting Him into your heart to have His death applied to your sins. And the plus nothing is just that – no additions or conditions.
 - a. Now there is no question but that we are saved by grace through faith plus nothing. However, the weakness of this statement is its simplified form. Why? Because over time the biblical depth this statement was intended to convey has been lost, so that today it is claimed saving grace includes no conditions, and the only requirement of saving faith is believing that Jesus Christ died for our sins.
 - b. And how did we get to this shallow understanding of salvation by grace through faith? I am sure there are several answers, human nature and the devil’s deceptions being two of them. But the problem I want to examine today is the selective use of certain scriptures to teach a truth of scripture, so that you end up defining such words as grace and saving faith more narrowly than they are defined by scripture.
 2. Therefore, I want to look at the larger pool of scripture from Paul’s words in the first eight chapters of Romans and Christ’s words in the Gospels regarding eternal salvation. And my purpose for addressing this issue is not to confuse you, or to start a new theology of salvation, or to discredit current Protestant theology. I want to show you two things by looking into this matter. First, I hope to show you a larger, and hopefully comprehensive truth regarding God’s grace and our faith in relation to salvation. And second, my hope in doing this is that you will see the wisdom of seeking to understand individual scripture statements on a given topic in the light of what the whole of scripture says about that topic.

- a. Now admittedly, I am discouraging the practice of selecting certain portions of scripture related to a specific topic and treating them as if they represent the whole truth regarding that topic.
 - b. And since Romans 8:13 addresses the topic of eternal life, and since it does it by speaking of dying in this life in order to live forever in the next – rather than speaking of God’s grace and our faith – I am using this verse as the starting point to show that Romans speaks of eternal salvation in a several different ways.
3. So, here in Romans 8:13, Paul uses two “if this happens, than that will happen” statements to speak about eternal damnation on the one hand, and the gift of eternal life on the other.
 - a. Paul says that if you are living according to the influence and direction of your flesh – inspired by your sinful passions and worldly desires –then you will die the death of eternal separation from God.
 - b. On the other hand, if by the empowerment and assistance of the Holy Spirit you are putting to death your sinful thoughts, words, and behaviors (*sins of the body or flesh*), then you will live eternally with God.
 - c. Notice, there is no mention of grace or faith. Paul’s emphasis is on our way of life – be it fleshly and sinful or godly and righteous. Now I want to be clear that this emphasis does not remove the need for God’s grace or our faith – for it does not change the fact that salvation is a gift from God. But what it does tell us, is that there is more to being saved by grace through faith than agreeing with the truth that Christ died for our sins and accepting God’s gift of eternal life.
4. In Romans 2:6-10, Paul says that God will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good, He will give eternal life. But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, He will give wrath and indignation.
 - a. Here again, Paul is directly addressing the topic of salvation without specifically mentioning God’s grace or our faith. And here again, his emphasis is on our behavior in relation to salvation and being given the gift of eternal life. And he does not stop here, for he goes on to say in Romans 2:13, that it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

- b. Does this exclude grace? No! It simply expands our understanding of God's grace to include the condition or expectation that those who receive His gracious gift of life will behave accordingly by pursuing and living a godly life until death. What about faith? Is it excluded? Again, no! It expands saving faith from simply intellectual agreement to include faithful obedience to the will and word of God. This is why James 4:26 says, "faith without works is dead."
5. Moving on to Romans 6:22-23, Paul says, "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- a. Notice the way Paul states the order of events: (1) being freed from sin, (2) enslaved to God, (3) this results in sanctification, (4) the outcome of sanctification is eternal life.
 - b. This sounds a lot like what many call "works based salvation." So is Paul saying in this passage that we are saved by works?
 - c. Again, the answer is a resounding no. Paul is making it clear that saving faith includes sanctification, that is, a sincere and measurable transformation of life, a transformation that must include our desires, thoughts, words, and deeds.
6. Now I have only taken statements from the first half of Romans. Paul says more of the same about salvation further on. However, I want to stop here and move us to the Gospels where we will look at Christ's words concerning eternal life. Again, my purpose is not to confuse or start something new, but to affirm that we must examine all that is said on this topic to gain a more accurate understanding of what it means to be saved by grace through faith.
- a. Jesus' most well-known and most used statement concerning eternal life comes from his conversation with Nicodemus. In John 3:3, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
 - (1) For some reason, those two words "born again" have become the defining statement of what it means to be saved. In fact, many identify themselves as "born again" Christians as opposed to some other kind of Christian or religious person.
 - (2) Now I am not suggesting these two words are not good words. After all, Jesus spoke them. What I want us to see is that Jesus said other things in describing what is required to

receive the gift of eternal life. And since Jesus said other things, I am convinced we must give His other statements equal weight when seeking to understand what He meant when He said we must be born again to see the kingdom of God.

- b. Moving on in John 3, we see that Jesus also said to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; [15] so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. [16] For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14-16). So we see from these words that being born again must include faith in Christ and His redeeming work.
- c. However, when asked by the young ruler what one must do to obtain eternal life, Jesus said, “Keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:16-17).
 - (1) Have you ever heard that used in an evangelistic presentation? The truth is, these words are ignored because to most Protestants today, these words contradict their understanding of God’s grace and saving faith.
 - (2) My encouragement to you is to consider that these words are just as important as the words “born again” or “believe in Jesus” so that you use them to gain an understanding of God’s grace and saving faith that takes in all God says about it, not just some of what He says.
 - (3) My final comment on these words of Jesus to the young ruler is that He is NOT removing grace and faith, but rather He is emphasizing the importance of behavior to being given the gift of eternal life.
- d. In encouraging His disciples to remain faithful regardless of the circumstances, Jesus said, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). Again, Jesus directly links godly behavior to being given the gift of eternal life.
- e. To the woman at the well, Jesus said, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

- (1) Consider, Jesus spoke about eternal life in terms that related to her driving desire to belong to someone who could satisfy her need to be feel loved and important. And we can assume she had such a need because she had gone through five husbands without having her thirst satisfied, and was trying to get it satisfied again by living with another man.
- (2) So here again, Jesus talks to her about eternal life in a way that emphasizes a change in her values and behavior. If she will drink His water, she will go from being discontent to being content. Of course, to drink this water and gain contentment requires faith in Jesus, submission to His rule, and faithfulness to His direction and leading.

III. Conclusion

- A. I hope you have remembered my two-fold purpose in taking you through these scriptures.
 1. Regarding my first purpose, we must take into account all that God says about salvation if we are to understand the true nature of saving grace and all that is included in saving faith.
 - a. Therefore, in seeking a more complete picture, we see from Romans and Jesus' words that God's saving grace is not given indiscriminately to everyone. He bestows His grace on those who meet His conditions for receiving His gift of salvation.
 - b. Does this change salvation by grace to salvation by works? Absolutely not. But it does mean there is no saving grace for those who do not pursue a life of faithful obedience to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
 - c. And we see from Romans and the Gospels that saving faith is more than believing that Jesus died for my sin in my place? It includes a change of direction and a transformation of behavior from obeying sin to faithful obedience to the will and word of God.
 2. Regarding my second purpose, it is foolish to pick some scriptures over others on a given topic. Such a practice may lead to a belief or doctrine we like or feel safer with, but it also leads to a shallow understanding and eventually a misleading belief or doctrine. Therefore, when studying a particular topic in scripture, look for all God says on the topic so that your belief or doctrine is complete.