

Transcript 155

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast. A few episodes recently we've discussed that our favorite type of question to answer are ones related to salvation. The absolute best question we receive is when someone asked basically how can I know for sure I would go to heaven when I die? Or how can I know for sure my sins are forgiven? Those are the type of questions absolute favorites to answer, because you can really get to the heart of the matter. We can deal with the person's relationship with God, how they can know Christ, how they can have their sins forgiven, be promised eternity in heaven. That's the most important question. Often so many of the questions we deal with are on side issues and not saying are important are not saying we don't want to help people on those issues, but if we have a choice, we would love to spend way more time helping people understand salvation than any of the topics.

Shea Houdmann

So Jeff, Kevin and I have been talking lately, we decided to do a three-part series on salvation. And the three parts are going to be, what does it mean that salvation is by grace alone? What does it mean that salvation is by faith alone? And what does it mean that salvation is in Christ alone? And today we're going to be talking about grace. So what does it mean that salvation is by grace alone? Jeff, won't you start us off, and what is grace? And why do we need it?

Jeff Laird

Well, grace is the the starting point for the entire concept of salvation. And I think one way that's easier to to sort of process these is that there's a lot of overlap between grace, faith and Christ, in what they do, what they don't do, how they function. But I think it's important for us to understand exactly what God is like because grace is really God's motivation or God's sort of step in this process. And grace is what explains to us why he offers us what we call justification, which is basically salvation from an eternal hell because of the things that we've done and the things that we deserve. So grace is that, that choice that God makes to extend something to us that's completely undeserved. Something that we've done nothing to earn and something that we have absolutely no right to. It's something that he's not obligated to. And that's where his nature comes in. So if we don't understand that God who's extending grace, we can't really understand what grace is.

Jeff Laird

So God is eternal, uncreated, necessary being. This means that God is completely self-sufficient. He doesn't need to create anything. He doesn't have to create anything. That also means that God is completely sovereign. He doesn't have to do any particular thing with his creation that he doesn't want to do. So there is no sense in which God is obligated to treat human beings in any particular way. And that's very uncomfortable for us as people to process, to understand. It's not something that we like. But it's the case. God is the one and only necessary eternal creator and we are not. So that starts us off with the idea of grace being something that is not deserved. It's not mandatory, it's not obligated. It is entirely a choice that God chooses.

Jeff Laird

Now, God is also absolutely holy, which means his separation from us. He is completely perfect in all of his attributes. He is the standard of power, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, all these things. By definition we don't meet that category. We can't because we're different from God. If he's going to create something, it's going to be different from him. So we don't have those things. So there again, grace is God making a choice to reach down to extend himself to human beings in order to accomplish some purpose of his. So obviously as we go through this, we'll talk a lot about the way that, that grace, faith, and Jesus Christ overlap when we talk about these. They're like that Venn diagram idea, but the easiest way to think of grace in this context is that it is this top down idea. Grace is why we need to be justified. Grace is how it starts the process of understanding how, but it's why God chooses to extend us grace in the first place. And it's really rooted in his nature and who and what he is.

Kevin Stone

Understanding that God is eternally holy is very important for understanding this concept of grace, which is God's undeserved blessings. And that's so key that it these blessings that God gives us are undeserved. We are not holy. And God is eternally holy. We don't measure up to God's standard. And sometimes I think we tend to kind of look at the wrong standard for ourselves. You know, I can look at you two guys and I can say well, I am more holy than Shea is and when it comes to Jeff,

Shea Houdmann

That's for sure.

Kevin Stone

When it comes to Jeff, I am definitely more holy than he.

Jeff Laird

No, no. Yeah.

Kevin Stone

Is, but that's not.

Jeff Laird

Statute of limitations. We're not putting any of that on the Internet. Keep going.

Kevin Stone

So, but see, that would be a faulty standard that I'm using. I'm that's not how I need to be measuring myself. I look, my standard is the holiness of God. And when God revealed his law to the Nation of Israel, that was the standard of holiness. And it was very plain, you know, can you keep all of these laws? Can you measure up to God's holiness? And the answer, of course, is no. And this is why we need grace because we lack righteousness. And not only do we lack righteousness, but we have no way of attaining it ourselves. We are stuck in sin. We are stuck with a, we just don't measure up to God's holy standard. In Mark Chapter 10 the young man comes to Jesus and he's a rich man. And Mark says that this man ran to Jesus, fell on his knees before him. He says good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus says why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. So right there God's pointing to

the standard. The standard of goodness, holiness is God alone. So are you are you truly associating me with that type of holiness?

Kevin Stone

And then Jesus continues and says in verse 19, you know the commandments. You shall not murder you shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother. Teacher, says this rich man, all these I have kept since I was a boy. And so this man, this man thinks that he's good enough. He thinks that he has maybe attained a certain level of righteousness, and maybe that's going to be enough to get him to heaven. To get him saved. I have kept all these things, he says. But then Jesus very quickly, very easily puts his finger on one place where this man is falling short. And Jesus says in verse 21. Well, we have the note here that Jesus looked at him and loved him, and I loved that detail. He loved this man, but he says one thing you lack, go sell everything you have and give to the poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. At this the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth. The man's problem was not that he had riches. The man's problem was that he loved his riches more than he loved Jesus. Because here he had just heard Jesus call. Jesus saying, here's my plan for you. You follow me. Let go of your material possessions and follow me. And the man couldn't do it. The man was breaking the the very first commandment, love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength, soul and mind. And Jesus with surgical spiritual precision just says here it is. Here is the sin that's keeping you from the Kingdom. You love things, the things of this world more than you love me.

Kevin Stone

And so I think that's just an illustration of all of our need for grace. Doesn't matter how many of the other rules that we've been keeping, we're always falling short in some way, every single one of us. Scripture says that all have sinned and fallen short of the grace of God. And even if we try to, you know, start keeping all the laws we, we can't keep them all. And Scripture is very plain that in Galatians 3 and verse 10, for example, that cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. In James 2 verse 10, whoever keeps the whole law and yet offends in one point, he is guilty of all. So even breaking one of the laws makes us a law breaker and a sinner in God's eyes. Nobody measures up to God's holiness. This is why we need God's grace. I mean, we we can't even keep the 10, right. The 10 commandments. How are we doing with those?

Kevin Stone

And then we can't even keep the one that Jesus said. It's it all boils down to love the Lord your God and then love your neighbor as yourself. We we break that one all the time. How many of us love God with all of our being all of the time and never falter in that. I mean by that, by that standard, we sin every day. And that because we are our, our love is so fickle and it gets placed here and there and we love different things. We tend to always want to love ourselves and that's that's human nature. So we need grace. We cannot attain God's righteousness. And he saw that. God knows that we lack righteousness. He saw that we cannot attain it ourselves. And so in his kindness and in his grace, he sent his one and only Son to take on human flesh to fulfill the law on our behalf and to die in our place. To rise again so that we could have his righteousness applied to our account.

Shea Houdmann

To me, grace is what distinguishes the Christian faith from every other religion in the world. But distinguishes historical biblical Christianity from all the pseudo Christian cults are out there. Grace, the fact that we can't earn our own salvation. There's nothing we can do that can make us worthy of it. And I remember early on in my Christian walk I really had a lot of trouble understanding, especially like the difference between what mercy and grace is and how both flow from the love is an attribute of God. Finally, having explained to me in words I can understand was that mercy is God not giving us the judgment that we deserve. I mean because of our sin you deserve to be eternally separated from God. Mercy is God not giving us that. Grace is God giving us good things that we do not deserve. Grace is God extending far, not only is God not judging us, as our sins deserve, he's also blessing us and amazingly, powerfully good ways showing us way beyond just what we don't deserve to give. Not giving us what we deserve. He's giving us what we don't. And that Contra distinction was very helpful for me and really understanding the salvation is all of grace.

Shea Houdmann

As I said, every other religion out there to varying degrees teaches that we earn our way to salvation. Or at least we contribute significantly to our salvation. And then maybe God does the last little bit. Salvation according to the Bible is all of grace. Nothing we can do can contribute to our own salvation is 100% grace. I'm the key verse in this salvation by grace through faith lives of course Ephesians 2:8-9. It says that for by grace are you saved through faith and this not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Both grace and faith are a gift from God. All of salvation is a gift from God. Nothing we could do to earn it, to make ourselves worthy of it, to in any way deserve it. It's it's all of God. And that's what makes both Christianity unique and also makes it a struggle for people because we want to have a part of it. We want to contribute. We want to, whether we'll admit it or not, we want to be able to take some pride in saying that, yeah, I I contributed to this. Yeah, sure God did most of it, but I still had a part. But no, the in the Christian Gospel salvation is 100% of grace. Nothing we can do can make us worthy of it and nothing we can do can earn it.

Jeff Laird

And this is why we said there's a lot of overlap between the ideas of being saved by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. Because when we talk about God extending grace, he has no obligation to extend grace to us at all. So when we start to talk about Christ, one of the the complaints that comes up or the the difficulties that we have is the idea that it's in Christ alone that were saved. But that again that reflects to and overlaps with the idea of grace. Which is that God's not obligated to offer any means of salvation at all. So rather than us as human beings being frustrated or flustered with the idea that why would God only offer one way? Why would there only be this one way for us to be saved? We should accept the idea that that's grace. That there's any way offered in the first place. So again, there's there's overlap between these these the overlap between the idea of saved by grace alone, and the idea of being saved by faith alone. Because as both of you were saying, there's no way that you can earn salvation. The the Bible is very explicit about the idea that you can't give God something he doesn't already have. I like the way Psalm 50 puts that. It's about verses 10 through 15. Where God is talking to Israel and he says, I don't need you to give me bulls and goats and sacrifices and so on. I already own everything. I already have that stuff. That's not the point. So all the good things that we do, yes, God wants us to do those things. He he expects us to respond to his grace in positive ways. But it's unbelievably arrogant for us to assume that I can somehow buy off the eternal, timeless uncreated

creator of the universe with whatever I can do in my little life, on this little rock, in this little side of the universe. So grace is this idea that God just does not have to offer us anything. But he chooses to offer it. So everything that comes from that has to be part of the mindset is that this is 100% God's choice. It is his decision. It's his mechanism. God is the one who is making this into a reality. We are not doing anything other than receiving it, insofar as he calls us to and allows us to.

Kevin Stone

He is under no compulsion whatsoever. Amen. He's under no obligation to have reached out to us, and that's really what it is. God, God reaches down to our level. Jesus came down to our level in order to walk among us. That is grace. And it is undeserved. As soon as we start using the word deserve when we talk about in the context of grace. You know, I I deserve this. I earned this. We have lost the concept of grace because grace is God's undeserved blessing. His unmerited favor. We can't really mix the two of, you know, human works or the keeping of the law, and God's grace. It's not that God says to us well, you do this and this and this and this and meet me halfway. I will. I'll take it from there. No, it's all of grace.

Kevin Stone

In Romans, Chapter 11 makes this case. As Paul is talking about the election of the remnant of Israel, God's choice of them, and he talks about grace in this matter. If by grace then it cannot be based on works. If it were, grace would no longer be grace. And so that's the the quickest and easiest way to destroy grace is to start adding your own works and saying now I can, I can help this matter along. I can save myself partially and God will do the rest. No, it's all of grace. God reaches down to the gutter and picks us up, washes us off, adopts us as his own children, gives us an inheritance in Christ, sets us in the heavenly places. It's God's work from beginning to end. It is a work of grace. We just don't deserve it. That's the very definition of grace.

Jeff Laird

We we talked a little bit about the idea of overlap of. A a visual, I think Kevin, that goes along with what you're saying, that I've tried to come up with ways that people can sort of understand your visualize these ideas, and one concept I think that helps here is the idea of sort of an hourglass shape. If one can imagine a triangle at the bottom, a triangle at the top with one point in the middle and grace is the top part of that. That's God reaching down to us. And to reach down to us, He's converging to something. Faith is us reaching up towards him. And as we seek God, we grow closer to what he's looking for, and that single point is Christ. So we we cannot possibly reach up high enough. We can't get through to God without Christ. And if God doesn't reach down, there's no possible way for us to interact with him. So grace is that God is making this even possible in the first place. All of these converge together, but they all have to converge together.

Kevin Stone

And I I love that illustration, Jeff. And I think it's, I think it's a valuable one as long as we remember that the the the reaching up of faith is is not a work in and of itself. It's God does the work and our response to that is, is faith. But faith in itself is not a work.

Jeff Laird

Right. And faith is not only not a work, but there's a lot of discussion about the extent to which God is really the one who puts faith into us in the first place. And that again is a part of the idea of grace. He's not obligated to even cause us to want that experience with him in the first place. So you're right, is that faith is not a work. I think Jesus does a really good job when he's talking just after one of his miracles, it's in John Chapter 6. When he talks about salvation and the crowd says so what, what is this work that we're supposed to do you know, in order to be saved? And Jesus says no, no, this is the work you're supposed to do. Believe in the one that God has sent. Which is sort of like if somebody says to me, what do you want me to bring to the party? And I say we'll just bring yourself. I don't mean pick yourself up and walk you up to the door. What I mean is, there isn't anything. It's not. So when Jesus says that that's what he's telling him, is there, there isn't anything. This is what you're supposed to do. You believe. That is the way that you obtain justification that God is choosing to offer.

Shea Houdmann

So what's most interesting in this something I've seen and a few questions lately is some sort of people wondering why are my works not, why can't I contribute to salvation? And I'm not sure which which cult or false religion these people have been from, but it's been something I've noticed a couple times. And I like to point people back to like an Isaiah 64:6. It says all our righteous acts are filthy rags and no need to go into any further what that filthy rags actually means. Lets just say it's gross. It's saying even our righteous acts are tainted to, say the least. Because and you know why? Why is that? Well, because even the righteous acts we do are not completely free from sin because it is virtually impossible, is it is completely impossible without Holy Spirit self. But to do a righteous act for that, an absolutely right reason with the right motives, with no sinful tint to it whatsoever.

Shea Houdmann

As an example. People giving to the poor, that's great something God calls us to do. But why are you doing it? Are you doing it to glorify God, or are you doing it because you feel sorry for poor people? So what's your motive in that? Are you doing it in any way to be recognized by others? Well, so with us, sinful motives always seem to get mixed in with even the righteous things we're trying to. Obviously, with Holy Spirit, those affections can be changed, but before Christ is is absolutely impossible for us to do any action that's purely and absolutely holy and righteous. With everything we do is tainted by sin. Even the the kindness that we showed to other people, everything. There is a taint to it. If you really examine yourself you'll you'll recognize this. Because unless we're doing it solely to bring honor and glory to God, then that act is not fully and completely righteous. So there's no way we can contribute anything to God because everything we would bring to him in place on the altar He looks at and said, why did you bring me that? Unless we're doing it through the power of Christ. To honor, to glorify God. It's not even a offering that he can look down on and be pleased with. So nothing we can do can contribute to our salvation.

Shea Houdmann

Now post salvation, we do good works as not to contribute to salvation, but out of gratitude for salvation. Out of thankfulness for what God has done for us. Out of this worshipping him for saving us by grace. But remember works, anything we can do if we're doing them to try to earn God's favor, that alone taints that work. In a in a horrible way makes it actually displeasing for God. If we're doing it for a reason, it's actually not God's will. It's not God's desire, not God's design.

Jeff Laird

A thought that's coming to my mind as we're talking about this is the idea of space and space travel, things like that. It's a little bit like the idea of saying that what we're supposed to attain is on the other side of the Galaxy. And you know, if somebody says well why can't my works contribute to that? And you know one argument to make for that is to say, even if you want to consider contribution, which you can't theologically, but even if you wanted to, you're talking about human effort trying to get you to the other side of the Galaxy. It doesn't matter how much better you are than other people at swimming, flying, climbing, engineering anything like that, that's just not possible. Unless God chooses to bridge that gap, then there is just, there is absolutely nothing from there, that's going to work. And that's just a step in the right direction because it's we we're not saying that you're right. It's 99.9999% God, you know, and my little tiny bit is just an insignificant contribution. No, you don't contribute anything whatsoever. But it's just sort of a mental stepping stone to be able to say you just have to understand how big the gap is between us and God's perfection. Such that even if you thought you could somehow build up to that, there is no way you would ever be able to get there in the first place. So you can sort of start from there and then come to realize that no, there really just isn't anything about my works. It's all grace.

Kevin Stone

In Romans 3:23 we have the need for grace presented to us. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But then the very next verse gives us the wonderful good news that God did not leave us in our sin. Romans 3:24 says all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. The word justification there refers to being made, the process by which we are made right with God. So we're taken from our sinful state to a place of being made right with God. We're reconciled with God. Then there are three words in this verse that I really, really love. One is the word freely. This is a gift of God, and it is free for the taking. As we accept this by faith. I love the word grace as well. God's blessings that he pours out on us freely and they are undeserved. And then of course I really love the word Jesus, that very last word in the verse. Jesus is our Savior. And it is because of Jesus that we have God's grace and we have it freely. What a wonderful message.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin, I couldn't think of a better way to close this episode. Romans 3:23, which is such a popular verse. Always, often using gospel presentations. But 3:24, I'm not saying it's forgotten, but it's a powerful verse to remind us that salvation is by grace alone. So this has been the Got Questions podcast. First in the series of three on what does it mean that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone? This has been the grace alone episode. Got questions? The Bible has answers. And we'll help you find them.