

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 19 OCTOBER 2020 – 25 OCTOBER 2020



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

A fundamental truth the Bible teaches is that our salvation is by grace alone. There is nothing we contribute towards our salvation. We do not deserve eternal life by our moral uprightness. We are not earning it by our hard work. Our salvation, forgiveness of sins, rescue from bondage to sin and judgement, entrance to heaven and the resurrected life, from beginning to the end, all is by God's grace alone. It is all God, none us.

But, hang on, if that were true, would it not make all sincere believers lazy and indifferent to how God wants us to live? If our salvation is by grace alone, then would we not lose all reasons and motivations to live godly lives? We've already got the ticket to enter heaven, so why would we still care how we live? If you asked this question yourself, it might actually be a sign that you understood the gospel of grace. But understanding the gospel of grace and having true faith in this gospel is two very different things. A muslim person can understand the biblical gospel of grace and ask the exactly the same question: Doesn't this teaching about salvation by grace alone make people indifferent and wicked?¹

The Bible's answer to this is a resounding no, as the catechism also says in Q64. Someone who truly believes in the gospel of grace is united to Christ. And being one with Christ, they have new desires, desires to live God's way, not out of fear or in a vain attempt to earn salvation, which is impossible. Rather, Christ, being one with us, bears fruit in us, motivating us to please God our Father with a firm confidence that He loves us. He even rewards our attempts at serving Him now because Christ is our perfect righteousness, and despite our own ongoing imperfections, God has become our gracious Father who delights in us as His children.

May this week's devotional aid help you ponder on God's glorious grace deeply and motivate you to trust Christ alone for salvation and love and obey Him more and more.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

<https://www.upperhunterpc.com>

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, p121.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM²

Lord's Day 24

Q62) Why can't our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of our righteousness?

A) Because the righteousness which can pass God's judgment must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law. But even our best works in this life are all imperfect and stained with sin.

Q63) How can you say that the good we do doesn't earn anything when God promises to reward it in this life and the next?

A) This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace.

Q64) But doesn't this teaching make people indifferent and wicked?

A) No. It is impossible for those grafted into Christ by true faith not to produce fruits of gratitude.

JEREMIAH 17:9

Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Here's a verse we all should memorise! It points to the root of the problem in the world. Underneath all wrong actions and thoughts, it is our heart that has gone wrong. We don't understand our own hearts. How many times have you wondered why you did what you did and why you want to do what you want to do? The reason why we cannot stand righteous before God is not merely because of some misdeeds we have done externally, with our hands and mouths. All our works are not acceptable to God because the our hearts behind them all are tainted with sins. Even "good works" are tainted with the desire to make ourselves more important and central than God Himself. What's more, we don't even notice it most of the time. The heart is indeed deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. Praise God that He gives us the righteousness we can never attain for ourselves! Jesus Christ is our righteousness!

2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Here, Paul professes to have lived for God (since his conversion to Christ). He looks forward to the day when he will be awarded for his service to Christ. This language of award or reward for the believers must be understood biblically. Unlike how we might expect, the reason God gives us the reward is not because our lives deserve or merit the reward. God's reason for giving us rewards is not in us, but in Christ. Therefore, it is not something we earn, but a free gift, i.e., grace. Thank God for His abundant grace!

JOHN 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

How is it possible that we can do good works? If our hearts are so deceptive and desperately sick, how can anyone do anything that can please God? And if everything about our salvation is by God's grace alone, then why should I care how I live anyway? Jesus in John 15:5 teaches us that we are to abide in Him as He abides in us. We are powerless by ourselves as far as good works are concerned. God is not pleased with anyone's charitable acts and will not reward them so long as they remain outside Christ. But when we are united to Christ by trusting Him, then we will inevitably bear fruit that pleases God. When we are one with Christ, we cannot but bear good fruit, because Christ is a good fruit bearing Saviour. Truly, all glory to Christ!

² The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.