

LET HIM DENY HIMSELF

In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent of the church of Rome issued a number of decrees, including this canon on the subject of Justification:

If any one saith, that the good works of one that is justified are in such manner the gifts of God, as that they are not also the good merits of him that is justified; or, that the said justified, by the good works which he performs through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life,-if so be, however, that he depart in grace,-and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema. (Session VI, Canon XXXII)

Put simply, in the view of Rome, the good works of the Christian merit eternal life. Antinomians, however, deny that good works have any necessary relation to faith and eternal life. So, the Grace Evangelical Society holds the following:

No act of obedience, preceding or following faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as commitment to obey, sorrow for sin, turning from one's sin, baptism or submission to the Lordship of Christ, may be added to, or considered part of, faith as a condition for receiving everlasting life (Rom 4:5; Gal 2:16; Titus 3:5). This saving transaction between God and the sinner is simply the giving and receiving of a free gift (Eph 2:8-9; John 4:10 ; Rev 22:17).

The truth is, in God's covenantal relations with man, man's good works do not merit salvation, but they are necessary to salvation.

God knows good and evil. (Genesis 3:22) This is to say, God is able to distinguish between good and evil. He knows what is good because He knows Himself, the very standard of goodness. He knows what is evil because He knows what is contrary to Himself. God is morally independent. There is no standard of morality independent of God, so there is no standard upon which God depends. God Himself is the standard. There are, therefore, some acts God cannot commit, because they are contrary to His nature. So, for example, God cannot lie. (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) When God made man, He made him in His image, which includes a will that makes moral choices. Yet, God did not create man like Himself, knowing good and evil. This is to say, God did not make man morally independent of Him, to make moral choices independent of Him. He made man to trust God, and to do as God commanded Him. Yet, it was necessary for God to test man's faith, to determine whether man would indeed follow God's moral law, or make his own laws. So, God forbade the first man, Adam, to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and He warned Adam that, if he should eat of it, then he would surely die. Adam chose, not to follow God, but to make his own way. He chose to be, not morally innocent, but morally cunning. So, Adam, because He disobeyed God, died, and mankind died with him. Since that original sin, every man comes into the world under sentence of death. Every man comes into the world morally corrupt, and condemned by God. The serpent, who led man to sin, with malice aforethought killed mankind. So Jesus said that the Devil was a murderer from the beginning. (John 8:44) Yet, God would not allow mankind to perish, but would save them. He said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15) God would undo what the Devil had done, and He would undo it by making some people His

own, and by giving them life. So, there would be continual conflict between those who have the Devil as their father, and those who have God as their Father. Moreover, one particular descendant of the woman would be the Devil's in doing. The Devil would deal that One a crippling blow, but He would deal the Devil a fatal blow.

All of Adam's descendents were sinners; yet, not all were lost. The Scriptures say that Adam's son, Seth, had a Son, Enos, and in Enos's time men began to call upon the Lord to save them. (Genesis 4:25, 26) So, the Scriptures say that Enoch and Noah walked with God, which is to say, they were in step with God, and were in communion with Him. (Genesis 5:24; 6:9) In those days, God saved men here and there. It was not until Abraham, however, that God began His program of saving the world. God said to Abraham:

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised that, if Abraham would leave his people and his place, and go to a place that He would show him, then He would give him a new people to dwell in that new place. God would make of Abraham a great nation, and He would make Abraham a blessing to the world, because through Abraham would come that One who would destroy the Devil and his works. Abraham obeyed God. He left his father's people, and his father's land, and he went to the land that God showed him, the land of Canaan. So, when Abraham was in the land of Canaan, God said to him:

Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. (Genesis 13:14-17)

Here God told Abraham more about His covenant promise. God told Abraham to look in every direction, and He promised to give to him all the land that he could see. Moreover, God told Abraham that He would give to him more descendants than he was able to count, more than the dust of the earth. Of course, God did not mean that he would give to Abraham only so much land as he was able to see; He would give to him all the land in all directions. God would give to Abraham immeasurable land for his innumerable descendants.

Some years passed, and Abraham had no son, and He asked God to reassure Him of His promise. So, repeated His promise. God said to Abraham, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." (Genesis 15:5) The Scriptures say that Abraham believed God, and God counted it as righteousness. Then Abraham said, "Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it." (Genesis 15:8) Abraham believed God, but Abraham wished to know that God would do as he said. So, he asked God to confirm His promise, and it pleased God to do so. Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation." (Hebrews 6:17, 18) God, desiring to demonstrate to the heirs of His promise that He would keep His promise, confirmed His promise with an oath. He told Abraham to collect certain animals, to cut the animals in half, and to lay the pieces in two rows across from each other. When the sun set, a deep sleep came upon Abraham, and a terror and great darkness came upon him, and God said to him:

Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. (Genesis 15:13–16)

Abraham believed God; he trusted God. Yet, he asked God for some confirmation, some proof, that God would keep His promise. God told Abraham that his descendents would be in a land that was not the promised land, and that the people of that land would enslave them and torment them for four-hundred years. God would judge that nation for their sins, and would bring Abraham's descendents out of that land with great wealth. As for Abraham, he would live a full life, and die in peace. It was not time yet for Abraham's descendants to inherit the land. After four generations, the wickedness of the Amorites, the inhabitants of the land, would be so great that then God would then send in Abraham's descendants to drive them out, and to possess the land. Because God is the greatest thing that exists, and so He could not swear on anything higher, He swore on Himself that He would fulfill what He had promised. When the day was gone, and it was completely dark, God walked between the pieces. So, God swore upon Himself an oath of malediction, agreeing that, if He did not fulfill His promise, then He would be destroyed as were the animals between whose carcasses He walked. Of course, it is not possible either for God to lie, or for Him to be destroyed, and so His promise was sure, and it was made sure to Abraham, and to his descendants.

When Abraham was around eighty-six years old, Sarah, Abraham's wife, told her husband to cause Hagar, her servant, to conceive a child, and Abraham did as his wife asked. When Hagar conceived she had contempt for Sarah, and Sarah had envy for Hagar, and blamed her husband for doing the very thing she asked him to do. She demanded that Abraham send Hagar away, and so he did. The angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar, and told her to return to her mistress, and to submit to her. Hagar did return, and then she bore a son, Ishmael, but this son would be heir to the promise.

Thirteen years later, when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abraham, and said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." (Genesis 17:1, 2) God spoke of the covenant He had with Abraham, a covenant with both promise and obligation. God is the Almighty God. He is worthy of man's service, and He is able to meet man's needs. God obliged Abraham to live blamelessly before Him, and God promised to give Him many descendents. Abraham, hearing the voice of God, humbly lay face down before Him, and listened to Him. The Lord continued:

As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (Genesis 17:4–8)

God had made covenant with Abraham, promising to make him the father of many nations. So, God changed his name from *Abram*, which means *Exalted Father*, to *Abraham*, which means *Father of a Multitude*. Abraham would be father of many nations, and father of many rulers. Moreover, God would give Abraham's descendents land in which to dwell. In this covenant, which is an everlasting Covenant, Abraham and his descendants would be God's people, and He would be their God. Then God said:

Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant. (Genesis 17:9–14)

God commanded Abraham and his descendants to be faithful to their covenant obligations. God added to this covenant a sign, the sign of circumcision. This was a fertility rite signifying God's promise to make Abraham and his descendants fruitful. God commanded the rite to be performed on every child in the covenant when he was eight days old. It was to be applied to every male that would, by birth or by purchase, be part of the covenant people of God. If anyone did not receive the sign of the covenant, then he forfeited the thing it signified: he would be cut off from the people of God, because he had broken the covenant. As God changed the name of Abraham, so he changed the name of Sarah, Abraham's wife. He changed her name from *Sarai*, which means *My Princess*, to *Sarah*, which means *Princess*, for she would be the princess of a multitude. God would fulfill His promise.

After the death of Abraham, there was a famine in the land, and Isaac intended to go into Egypt for food. The Lord appeared to his son Issaac, and He said to him:

Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. (Genesis 26:2–5)

God told Isaac not to go into Egypt, but to remain in his land, and, if he did as God commanded, then God would perform the oath he swore to Abraham: He would give him innumerable descendants, and a land in which to dwell. The Lord said He would do this because Abraham was faithful to his covenant with God, keeping all His commandments.

After Saint Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus told His disciples that the leaders of Israel would deny Him, and crucify Him, but He would three days later rise from the dead. Saint Peter rebuked Him. Peter regarded Jesus as a conquering hero, not a suffering servant. Jesus looked at His disciples, and rebuked Peter, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of

God, but the things that be of men.” (Mark 8:33) Saint Peter did not know what He was saying, and did not know that he was a tool of the devil. After John the Baptist baptized Jesus, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. The Devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and told Jesus he would give Him all those kingdoms if He would worship and serve him. Jesus answered the Devil, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” (Matthew 4:10) The Devil, through Saint Peter, tempted Jesus to avoid the very thing He came into the world to do: to die so that the world might live. Jesus called together the crowds with His disciples, and He said to them all:

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8:34–38)

If any man would, like Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, walk with God, then He must walk with Jesus. If any man would walk with Jesus, then He must give His life to Jesus. If a man would save His life, then he must give His life to Jesus. Jesus is the One that God promised would destroy the world of the Devil. He knew what it was to be tempted by the Devil. The Devil offered Jesus the world in exchange for His soul. Jesus taught His followers that, to give one's soul to the Devil in order to gain the world is a great loss, a deal that no one should make. If one would save His soul, then He must give it to Jesus. God the Father appointed Jesus to be judge of the world. If any man would deny Jesus, and not himself, then Jesus, when He came in judgment, would deny that man. If any man will not live for Jesus, then He will perish without Him. With Jesus, it is all, or nothing.

Saith Paul wrote to the Romans:

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect. (Romans 4:13, 14)

God did not promise Abraham a mere section of land in Palestine; He promised Abraham the world. He promised Abraham that He would be the father, not of one nation, but of many. Moreover, God made this promise to Abraham before He gave the law to Moses. By faith Abraham received the promise, not as a Jew, but as a man. This means that anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who believes in Jesus will save his soul. What is more, he will, along with Jesus, and Abraham, inherit the earth.

On one occasion, Jesus had a conflict with some Jews who believed in Him. They justified themselves, saying, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus answered them, “ If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” (John 8:39) If one would save his soul; if he would be right with God and inherit eternal life, then must, like Abraham, by faith receive the promise. He must believe in Jesus. Yet, he must also do the works of Abraham. In the New Covenant, as in the others, there is both promise, and obligation. God obliges those who are baptized into Christ Jesus to give their lives to Jesus, and to live obediently to Him; If they do, God for His part, promises to forgive their sins for Christ's sake, and to give them eternal life.

Let us understand that God's covenants have both promise, and obligation. Let us give our lives to Jesus, so that we might live, and not die. Let us believe that God promised to Abraham, and to Christ, the whole world.

Unto the Son who must reign, till he hath put all enemies under His feet, and unto Him that put all things under the Son, that God may be all in all, be honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.