

# Peter succinctly states the mission and objective of all religions . . .

. . . the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. <sup>1Pe 1:9</sup>

For all their differences, the one thing all religions have in common is the goal of the salvation of one's soul.

Basis of and for This Salvation of Our Souls		
Grace	Works or Grace <b>and</b> Works	Universalism
The clear and true, <i>Bible</i> - defined, Christianity	The notion that something we have done or will do will provide the catalyst so that God saves us - this is faith of most World religions - including being the predominate "Christian" teaching.	The belief that all people are "saved."
While we must be careful NOT to neglect God-given grace, nothing we can do will earn or initiate it!	These works can range from OUR faith, being baptized, going to church, giving to the church, acts of charity to others, taking Communion, believing and following the teachings of a man, praying, fasting . . . you name it, but one or more things we do initiate and maintain God's favor, grace and resulting salvation.	The is the easiest doctrine to understand - God is love, God is good, he understands our weaknesses and since he made us (and made us like we are) he will accept and save our souls - what else could we expect of ourselves and a good and loving God?
No person has any hope, within themselves, of saving themselves	Everyone, if only they will exercise the free-will they possess to do what God expects and requires (and has outlined in one or another Holy book[s]), can and will be saved	The question of our ability is moot - God understands our weaknesses and will happily forgive any shortcomings.
No one has hope!	We have hope if we do everything God asks (or at least most - 70% is passing?) - which is within our God-given abilities!	Everyone, praise God, has hope!

There are some nuance differences within each of the above "categories," but over-all they catch the flavor of the predominate religious beliefs and alternatives. Since I am not interested in Universalism or the solely works-based religions – I will highlight the fine line between what the *Bible* teaches in contrast to what many "Christian" churches proclaim and preach. Only a foolish professing Christian would say grace is not important, indeed vital, to the "salvation of our souls." But this doesn't mean they REALLY believe and follow what the *Bible* says in relation to grace and this salvation.

As Martin Luther wisely stated:

Therefore I oftentimes say, that this doctrine of faith is very plain, and that every man may easily understand this distinction of the law and grace, as touching the works, but as touching the use and practice it is very hard. *Commentary on Epistle to the Galatians page 147*



Maybe this can best be understood by analogy. If you talk to most "Christians" about their religion, they will tell you a person is saved by faith in Jesus Christ. But in the same way a person is not a policeman because of the uniform – the uniform is simply an evidence they are more than likely a true policeman – faith in Jesus Christ (what he said, who he said he was, what he said about man, including ourselves . . .) is (if we are to believe the *Bible*) not the source of salvation, only the key evidence of our salvation – that faith comes in and from salvation as evidence of this salvation; salvation is by grace apart from anything and everything we do (and in spite of, not because of, ourselves) .

No, this is not a popular notion, but it is what the *Bible* clearly states:

As for you, you were dead [dead people aren't able to do even a little – they are dead, hopeless!] in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us [not some, but ALL] also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us [not our love for God – His love for us – in spite of ourselves!], God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ [NOW we have hope – now, maybe we can have some faith] even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved [That's it – grace? Nothing else?]. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. [Just to make it clear, God states it again] For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this [even the faith – so it is all of grace] not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. Eph 2:1 - 9

One of, if not the greatest, challenge of those seeking to find and hold on to the truth is doing so in the face of the many, often compelling and convincing, arguments of those much better educated and trained than we are. Church after church, calling themselves Christians, do not believe what the *Bible* states, especially about grace being a sovereign gift of God – a grace based not on anything we do, but in spite of ourselves and our actions. And they vehemently deny what Paul proclaims as the truth – that God, indeed, is sovereign. But they stutter, “If God is sovereign, instead of every man having equal chance for faith in Jesus Christ, based on exercising their free-will, God would be unfair! I can't believe that . . . !” Don't believe it and you have to create or follow a non-Biblical religion. Paul, quoting Moses, is not ashamed of the Gospel of God's sovereignty in the face of man's total helplessness (being dead):

It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?” But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ ” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? Ro 9:16 – 21

In the final analysis, our religion, like much of life (and death itself) is personal – we can discuss it with others, but it cannot be shared by and with anyone else; we will, in the end, stand or fall on what we have believed. We can, and should, encourage each other, but in the end we are on our own.

It is, therefore, foolish to put our eternal life into anyone's hands – the *Bible* time and again, as one of its major themes, warns:

Test everything. Hold on to the good. 1Th 5:21

“Watch out for false prophets.” Mt 7:15

Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Mt 24:11

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. Mt 24:24

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord. <sup>2Pe 2:1</sup>

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>1Jn 4:1</sup>

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. <sup>Jude 1:3 - 7</sup>

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. <sup>Jude 1:17 - 19</sup>

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. <sup>Jude 1:20 - 21</sup>

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. <sup>Ac 17:11</sup>

Even if Peter or Paul were here to personally tutor and teach us, we would be commended only if we followed the pattern of the Bereans by receiving the message with great eagerness and then faithfully examining the Scriptures every day to see if what Peter or Paul (how much more anyone speaking to us today!) said is true; the salvation of our souls depends on it! This is the holding on to the gift of grace given us, rather than neglecting and losing it.

True teachers will point us to the facts that:



Jesus Christ is the **ONLY** possible Savior.



The *Bible* is the absolute and only true and relatable word from God.



Grace (God’s ability in the face of our inability) is the only means God uses to save anyone’s soul.

Yes, we will all stand alone before God to test for the grace offered to us and what we did with this grace. Joshua had wise words for the Jews that equally apply to us today:

“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped . . . and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods . . . in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

<sup>Jos 24:14 - 15</sup>