

Faith, Grace, and ~~Works~~ **Actions**

Which *One* of these are *You* Saved By?

Bruce T. Forbes, 2013

(Portions of this essay are quoted from my 1995 book "Faith, Grace and Works: A Chord in the Hymn of Salvation".)

In past writings, I have compared the relationship of Faith, Grace, and Works to a musical chord, which, if there was one note missing, would not be right. I have also compared Faith, Grace, and Works to a three-rotor helicopter, which, if missing one of the three rotors, would become a disaster. Recently, as the Lord has continued teaching me line by line, precept upon precept, grace for grace, I have made an interesting discovery, which I will share at the end of this writing.

First, you need a good view of the three players.

FAITH:

The First Step

Faith isn't something you can touch; it isn't something you can reach out and hold in your hand. Faith isn't anything you can take out of a box and show to your friends or hang on the wall like a plaque for all to admire. To top it all off, you can't even see faith. You can, however, see the fruits of having faith.

Yes, you can have faith. In fact, you must have faith! *"But without faith it is impossible to please him . . ."* (Hebrews 11:6)

And, you can feel faith. Faith is one of the purest, most divine feelings we can possess - it's that which leads to all other feelings and conditions of goodness and divinity we can experience. But, we often ask, how can we have or feel something we cannot hold or see? Sometimes we experience things such as happiness and love. But when asked to explain them, we are very hard-pressed for words. We usually end up describing the feelings or the outward signs associated with such things. Happiness and love are, among other things, emotions, and we usually happy if we can just barely describe them that far. But more than that, these are also states of mind, and conditions of self and the world around us.

Often, the closer we come to things of God the harder it is to pin down a definite definition for things we cannot see or touch - such things need to be felt and experienced. So it is with faith.

We have received, throughout scriptural history, several definitions to help us find the gateway to the path of faith. Paul, the great missionary of the New Testament, taught that ". . . *faith is the substance¹ of things hoped for, the evidence² of things not seen.*" (Hebrews 11:1)³ Paul's definition takes on added meaning through additional translations: *"To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for,*

1 Greek *hypóstasis*: assurance, basis, foundation.

2 Greek *élenchos*: proof; conviction

3 Compare Ether 12:6 and Alma 32:21.

to be certain of the things we cannot see." (Good News Bible); *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* (New International Version); *"AND WHAT IS FAITH? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see."* (New English Bible); *"Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen."* (The Jerusalem Bible)

To gather all these clues together, then, we might say that Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge. Faith is to hope for things we cannot see that are nevertheless true. Faith is evidence, or proof, of things we cannot see but are true. To simplify further, we might say that faith is: a basis; foundation; assurance; evidence; proof; hope.

The LDS Bible Dictionary defines faith in these words:

Faith is to hope for things which are not seen, but which are true (Heb. 11:1; Alma 32:21), and must be centered in Jesus Christ in order to produce salvation. To have faith is to have confidence in something or someone. The Lord has revealed Himself and His perfect character, possessing in their fulness all the attributes of love, knowledge, justice, mercy, unchangeableness, power, and every other needful thing, so as to enable the mind of man to place confidence in Him without reservation. Faith is kindled by hearing the testimony of those who have faith (Rom. 10:14–17). Miracles do not produce faith, but strong faith is developed by obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ; in other words, faith comes by righteousness, although miracles often confirm one's faith.

Faith is a principle of action and of power, and by it one can command the elements, heal the sick, and influence any number of circumstances when occasion warrants (Jacob 4:4–7). Even more important, by faith one obtains a remission of sins and eventually can stand in the presence of God.

All true faith must be based upon correct knowledge or it cannot produce the desired results. Faith in Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel and is more than belief, since true faith always moves its possessor to some kind of physical and mental action; it carries an assurance of the fulfillment of the things hoped for. A lack of faith leads one to despair, which comes because of iniquity.

Although faith is a gift, it must be cultured and sought after until it grows from a tiny seed to a great tree.⁴ The effects of true faith in Jesus Christ include (1) an actual knowledge that the course of life one is pursuing is acceptable to the Lord (see Heb. 11:4); (2) a reception of the blessings of the Lord that are available to man in this life; and (3) an assurance of personal salvation in the world to come. These things involve individual and personal testimony, guidance, revelation, and spiritual knowledge. Where there is true faith there are miracles, visions, dreams, healings, and all the gifts of God that He gives to His saints. Jesus pointed out some obstacles to faith in John 5:44 and 12:39–42 (see also James 1:6–8).⁵

On Whom do we place this faith? Paul admonishes us - "*. . . let us run with patience the race*

⁴ Alma chapter 32

⁵ LDS Bible Dictionary, *Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, copyright 2013 Intellectual Reserve, INC)

that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher⁶ of our faith . . ." (Hebrews 12:1-2)
 Other translators have rendered verse two as: *"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end . . ."* (Good News Bible); *"Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection . . ."* (The Jerusalem Bible); *" . . . looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith . . ."* (Revised Standard Version). Perhaps the clearest translation of all - *" . . . our eyes centered on Jesus, on whom faith depends from start to finish . . ."* (New English Bible)

AMAZING GRACE:

Mercy, Love, Help, and Rescue from Above

Easton's Bible Dictionary gives the word *Grace*, as used in the New Testament, seven different definitions:

- (1) Of form or person (Prov. 1:9; 3:22; Ps. 45:2). [a graceful person]
- (2) Favour, kindness, friendship (Gen. 6:8; 18:3; 19:19; 2 Tim. 1:9). [you grace my life]
- (3) God's forgiving mercy (Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:5).
- (4) The gospel [of Christ] as distinguished from the law [of Moses] (John 1:17; Rom. 6:14; 1 Pet. 5:12).
- (5) Gifts freely bestowed by God as miracles, prophecy, tongues (Rom. 15:15; 1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:8).
- (6) Christian virtues (2 Cor. 8:7; 2 Pet. 3:18). [the grace we show others]
- (7) The glory hereafter to be revealed (1 Pet. 1:13).⁷

When we are speaking of Faith, Grace, and Works as a means of Salvation, I appreciate the definition of Grace offered by one church leader:

"God's grace consists in his love, mercy, and condescension toward his children. The creation of the earth, life itself, the atonement of Christ, the plan of salvation, kingdoms of immortal glory hereafter, and the supreme gift of eternal life - all these things come by the grace of him whose we are."⁸

I also appreciate the LDS Bible Dictionary's definition:

A word that occurs frequently in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul. The main idea of the word is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

It is through the grace of the Lord Jesus, made possible by His atoning sacrifice, that mankind will be raised in immortality, every person receiving his body from the grave in a condition of everlasting life. It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that

6 Greek *teleiotes*: completer; consummator; one who completes and perfects

7 M.E. Easton, Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1897, is in the Public Domain; notes in brackets by this author

8 Bruce R. McConkie, MORMON DOCTRINE (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1966) pg. 338-339

individuals, through faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts.

Divine grace is needed by every soul in consequence of the Fall of Adam and also because of man's weaknesses and shortcomings. However, grace cannot suffice without total effort on the part of the recipient. Hence the explanation, "It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Ne. 25:23). It is truly the grace of Jesus Christ that makes salvation possible. This principle is expressed in Jesus' parable of the vine and the branches (John 15:1–11). See also John 1:12–17; Eph. 2:8–9; Philip. 4:13; D&C 93:11–14.⁹

Consider the use of this word as you read the final three verses of the Book of Mormon:

Yea, come unto Christ [Faith], and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength [Works/Actions], then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen. (Moroni 10:32–34; notes in brackets by this author)

WORKS / ACTIONS:

What are the Works/Actions that bring Salvation?

Salvation by Works is in part the various ordinances required to obey God and to follow Christ. These include baptism by immersion, the receiving of the Gift of the Holy Ghost, and the making of covenants with the Lord in the holy temples. Ordinances and covenants are most definitely required, but we must remember that they are but the gateway to the path of Works required of all who claim to follow and hope in Christ. They are but the gateway to the Strait and Narrow Path that will return us to our Father in Heaven's presence.

What's left? What's left is a lifetime of following and obeying the commandments of God; a lifetime of continuously learning more about God and Christ and what they expect of us; a lifetime of repenting for our sins and transgressions and perfecting ourselves in order to become more like Them, a

⁹ Bible Dictionary, *Grace* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, copyright 2013 Intellectual Reserve, INC)

lifetime of deeds proving us worthy of our Father's love and blessings.

Rather than speaking of Works, it would be better to use words such as Actions and Deeds. It is not just by hearing and professing the Gospel that we are saved, but through our Actions - by applying and living the gospel principles as we learn them - that we prove ourselves worthy of salvation and exaltation.

The scriptures clearly indicate a wide gap between words and actions:

"They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him . . ." (Titus 1:16)

". . . The man who says, 'I know him', while he disobeys his commands, is a liar and a stranger to the truth . . ." (1 John 2:4, New English Bible)

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [mirror]: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh unto the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James 1:22-25, comment by author)

Hebrews chapter 11 in the New Testament and Ether chapter 12 in the Book of Mormon are a virtual Faith Hall of Fame of those pilgrims through life who, through Faith, performed actions worthy of gaining an Eternal Life. Both these chapters are worth reading to help in understanding that Faith and Grace are not stop signs - they are road markers.

Christ Himself taught the importance of these actions, or 'good works'. The following quotes from the Sermon on the Mount make plain the importance of our actions:

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:19)

"Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have casts out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house in the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and

the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."
(Matthew 7:24-27; see also Luke 6:47-49.)

Additionally, Christ also taught that -

". . . he that doeth truth cometh into the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought of God." (John 3:21)

"For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15)

The Apostles also taught that all men and women -

". . . should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." (Acts 26:20)

"Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Philippians 4:9)

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14)

The Epistle of James is one of the greatest sources for teachings concerning the relationship of Works and Faith. The Jerusalem Bible contains what I consider to be as plain a translation as one could want of this discourse - it cuts right to the heart of the matter:

"Take the case, my brothers, of someone who has never done a single good act but claims that he has faith. Will that faith save him? If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, 'I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty,' without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that? Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead.

"This is the way to talk to people of that kind: 'You may say you have faith and I have good deeds; I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds - now prove to me that you have faith without good deeds to show. You believe in the one God - that is creditable enough, but the demons have that same belief and tremble with fear. Do realize, you senseless man, that faith without good deeds is useless. You surely know that Abraham our father was justified by his deed, because he offered his son Isaac on the altar? There you see it: faith and deeds were working together; his faith became perfect by what he did. This is what scripture really means when it says: 'Abraham put his faith in God, and this was counted as making him justified', and that is why he was called 'the friend of God'.

"You see now that it is by doing something good, and not only by believing, that a man is justified. There is another example of the same kind: Rahab . . . [was] justified by her deeds because she welcomed the messengers and showed them a different way to l

eave. A body dies when it is separated from the spirit, and in the same way faith is dead if it is separated from good deeds." (James 2:14-26, Jerusalem Bible)

So, 'Works', as spoken of when preaching and writing about 'Salvation by Works', is the actions - the deeds - we perform daily. It is the receiving of sacred ordinances; it is living the commandments of God on a daily basis. It is acts of love and charity towards our fellow men and women; it is enduring in the gospel to the end of mortal life. It is the long road of becoming ". . . *perfect, even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.*" (3 Nephi 12:48; see also Matthew 5:48.)

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. (Matthew 16:27)

Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:28-29)

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. (1 Corinthians 3:13)

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which was the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. (Revelation 20:12-13)

The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God... and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (Alma 11:43-44)

. . . judging every man according to his works and the deeds which he hath done. (Doctrine & Covenants 19:3; see vs. 1-3)

(Other references include: Psalms 62:12; Jeremiah 17:10; Ezekiel 7:8-9; Ezekiel 36:19; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Revelation 22:11-13; 1 Nephi 15:30-36; Alma 5:14-21; Alma 41:3-10; 3 Nephi 26:4-5; 3 Nephi 27:9-17; 3 Nephi 27:25-26; Doctrine & Covenants 137:7-10; Doctrine & Covenants 138:57- 59)

A Pilgrim's view of Faith, Grace, and ~~Works~~ **Actions**

One of my favorite books is PILGRIM'S PROGRESS by John Bunyan. Written nearly four-hundred years ago, it has remained in print since the day it was first published. Only with the advent of the belief that one is saved solely by Faith or solely by Grace as the popularity of this classic work wained. Too bad.

This book is about a pilgrim named Christian, who, living in the city of Destruction, becomes aware of his awful state. Having the gateway to the Strait and Narrow Path that will lead him home to the great Celestial City pointed out to him, he goes there and, in Faith, pleads for entrance. His Faith is rewarded on page eighteen of the edition I read.

It is of note that his expression of Faith and being allowed onto the King's Highway is not the end of the story; it is but the beginning.

On page thirty-two, Christian kneels at the foot of a hill topped by a cross, a sepulcher at its base. Here the awful load of pain and sorrow and sin falls from his shoulders and rolls into the sepulcher. Christian exclaims: "He hath given me Rest by his Sorrow, and Life by his Death." Thus Grace has come down from above.

But this is also not the end of the story! This is but the Lord sending His love, mercy, healing, and strength (His Grace) for the rest of Christian's journey, which takes another one-hundred and fifty pages! During all these pages, Christian's faith is tried many times, and just as many times as he renews his Faith, divine Grace reigns from Above to strengthen and empower him for the Works and Actions required to continue and complete his journey.

If his Faith had died, Grace would have dried up, and the power to carry on with his Works and Actions would have ceased.

If he had refused the love and mercy and strength and all other gifts from God needed to carry on with his pilgrimage, he would not have had the ability to continue his journey, no matter how great his Faith.

If, once he felt rewarded for his Faith, and had felt Grace from above, he decided to sit idle in an arbor along the side of the road and exclaim that salvation had been won – well, he would still be sitting there at the beginning of his pilgrimage with no destination or reward in sight, wouldn't he?

Without one of these three – Faith, Grace, or ~~Works~~ **Actions** – the pilgrims Christian and Christiana would have never reached the Celestial City, to kneel at the feet of the Great King and His Son and hear the words "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*" (Matthew 25:21)

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

And we know that all men must repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ, and worship the Father in his name, and endure in faith on his name to the end, or they

cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true; And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their might, mind, and strength. But there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God; Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation; Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also. (Doctrine and Covenants 20:29–34)

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
To save a wretch like me!
I once was lost, But now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see!*

Now through His Grace my Faith has found
A place to seed and bloom -
From smallest seed to largest tree
My Faith now knows no bounds.

With boundless Faith my hands will reach
To help all those in need -
Thus Faith and Works will close the gap,
And prove His Grace complete.

Then through His Grace and through my Faith,
And through the fruited Works,
I will, one day, stand firm before
The opened Heavenly Gates.

Amazing Grace, Amazing Faith,
Amazing Works, combined!
I once was lost, but now I'm found;
Was blind, but now I see.

*(This first verse is from the immortal hymn 'Amazing Grace' by John Newton; the remaining verses by this author. This was not written to be sung but merely to illustrate the progress from Faith to Grace to ~~Works~~ **Actions**.)*
