

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRU the BIBLE

# THE FAITH EQUATION

FAITH + 0 = SALVATION

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

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***I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. –Galatians 2:20-21***

What's our greatest doctrine?

Each one holds its significant place in God's agenda, but one stands out as significant to our personal faith. It is this: We are justified by faith. Put simply, salvation comes only by the grace of God.

Galatians sets the grace of God in its proper priority, saying, "if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

The book of Galatians gripped Martin Luther. As an Augustinian monk, he spent nights lying on a cold slab, fasting, and forcing many other stringent practices on himself in hopes of achieving God's favor. He'd been studying Galatians, so one day as he ascended the Scala Sancta (the Holy Stairs in Rome) on his knees,

it came to him that man was not justified by works—certainly not by the things *he* was doing. Works could not bring him into a right relationship with God; God made it clear He saves men by faith alone. So Martin Luther rose from his knees and instead went out into Europe and proclaimed a gospel that drove back the darkness of the Dark Ages and took the chains and shackles from the minds and hearts of the multitudes of Europe. Today, this great civilization again can be restored only by the preaching of the great doctrines Paul taught in this epistle.

God also used Galatians to prompt the great spiritual movement led by the Wesley brothers. John Wesley came to America as a missionary to Native Americans, but his mission was a failure. Returning to England in discouragement, he said, “I came to America to convert Indians, but who is going to convert John Wesley?” Back in London, walking down Aldersgate Street one night, he heard singing coming from an upstairs window. He found the stairway, went up, and discovered it was a meeting of Quakers, the followers of George Fox. He took his place in the back of the little auditorium and listened to a message from Galatians. Later, John Wesley wrote in his journal, “As he read and spoke from the Epistle to the Galatians, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and there was given me there an assurance that He had taken away my sins, even mine.”

What is this great truth that has so moved the men of the past and which today is the only thing that can move the world and bring revival? Paul stated it succinctly in his letter to the Romans:

***But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.*** –Romans 4:5

The only way God can accept a sinner and make him righteous is through faith in Jesus Christ. That’s the great truth being left out of churches today. God refuses to accept law-keeping or good works. The very moment someone says, “I’m depending on

doing this or that for my salvation,” it means two things: He is trusting his works, and he is *not* trusting Christ. There is only one conclusion that can be drawn: That person is not saved at all.

Salvation is only by faith in Christ.

After all, what works do you and I have to offer God? We are like the little boy whose father was doing some building in the backyard. The little fellow wanted to help, so he got his hammer and nails and began driving in nails where they didn't belong and using a saw where he shouldn't be sawing. His “helping” was not really acceptable. As much as the father loved his son, he couldn't accept his work. It could not be used.

Do you think God can take *your* good works for your salvation when He has already declared us sinners?

The Law God gave to Moses was never given to save people. Paul calls it a “ministry of death and condemnation” (see 2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). Instead, God gave us the Law to show us we are lost sinners. Listen to Paul:

***What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made....*** –Galatians 3:19

That Seed, Paul says later on, was Jesus Christ. The Law was merely a temporary measure given for the sake of transgressions.

The Law cannot *remove* sin; rather, it *reveals* sin. It was not given for salvation at all. It was given to show us we are sinners. Man is not a sophisticated or refined sinner, as some folk would have you believe today—the Mosaic Law reveals people are, by nature, sinners in the raw.

Let me use a very common illustration. Don't be shocked if I take you into the bathroom for a few moments. I'm sure you have in your bathroom right now a sink and on the wall, a mirror. That mirror is there to reveal your condition. You look into it, and it

may reveal a smudge on your face, but *it will not remove it*. Many people use the mirror of the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount to try to remove the smudge of sin. It won't work. If you go into your bathroom, look in the mirror, and see you have a dirty face, you don't rub your face against the mirror to get it clean. That's not the way it's done. Yet churches today are filled with people rubbing up against the Word of God, hoping they will be able to remove their sin by contact. The Sermon on the Mount *as a religion* makes more hypocrites than anything I know of, because if you are honest you *know* you are not living by it. All it does is reveal you come short of the glory of God.

But down beneath that mirror there is a sink.

*There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains.*

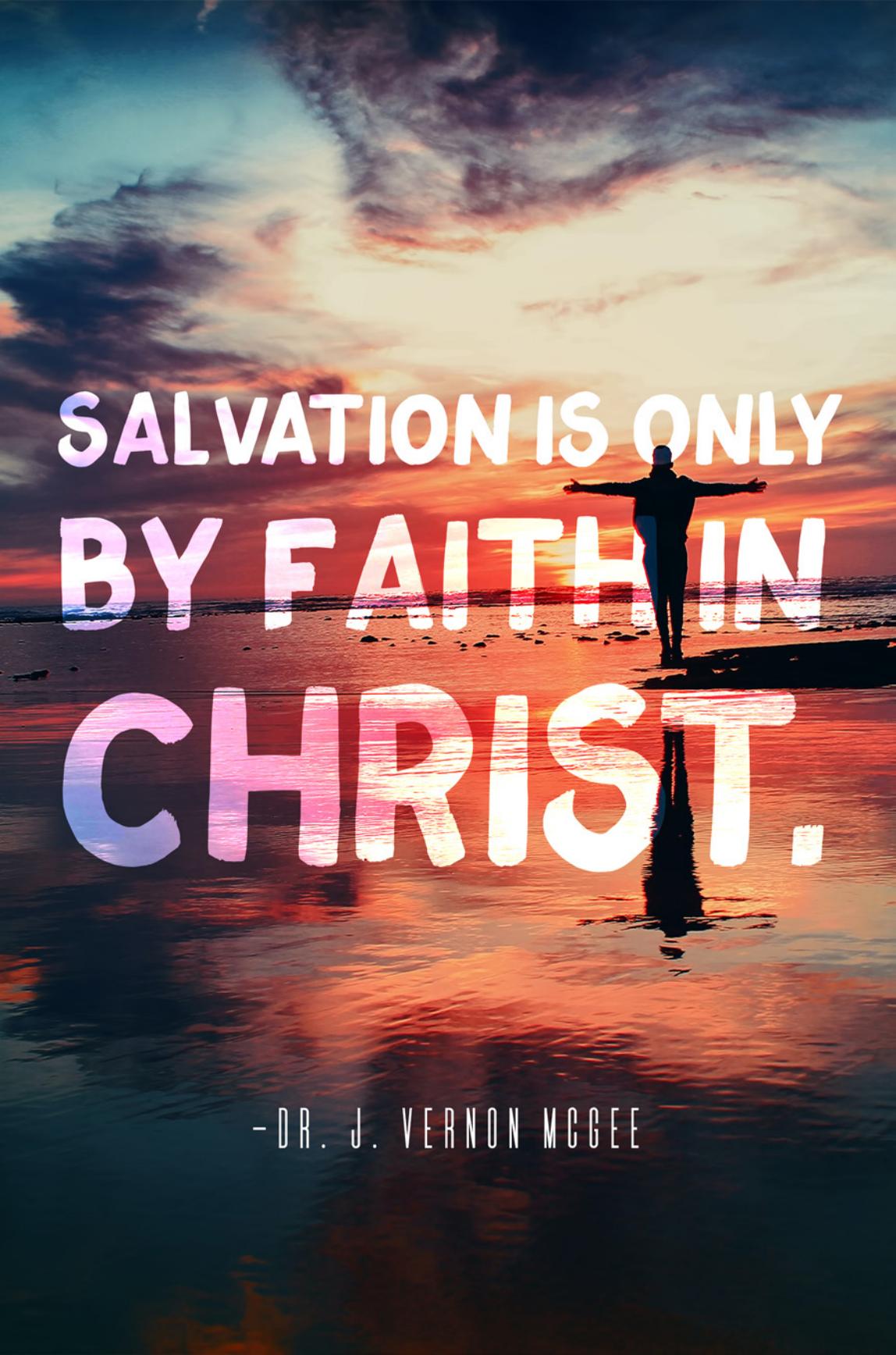
–William Cowper

God has a place to take away sins, but it is not the Law. Jesus Christ, through His blood on the cross, paid the penalty for your sin. It is your trust and faith in Him that saves you; nothing else can.

Galatians 3 tells us something else about the Law:

***Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*** –Galatians 3:24

The Greek word used here, *paidagogos*, doesn't mean tutor at all. It means a servant or a slave who took care of the children who were part of a Roman household. Of the 120 million people in the Roman Empire, 60 million were slaves. When a child was born, he was put in the custody of a servant who raised him. He put clean clothes on him, bathed him, and paddled him when he needed it. When the little one was ready to start school, this servant got him ready every morning and walked with him to

A person stands on a beach at sunset, arms outstretched, silhouetted against the bright orange and yellow sky. The person's reflection is visible in the shallow water. Large, bold, white text is overlaid on the image, reading "SALVATION IS ONLY BY FAITH IN CHRIST." The text is arranged in three lines: "SALVATION IS ONLY" on the top line, "BY FAITH IN" on the middle line, and "CHRIST." on the bottom line. The background shows a sunset over the ocean with a cloudy sky.

SALVATION IS ONLY  
BY FAITH IN  
CHRIST.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

school and entrusted him to a teacher. That is where the servant got the name of *paidagogos*—*paid* has to do with the feet (we get our word “pedal” from it) and *agogos* means “to lead.”

Paul says the Law is our *paidagogos*. The Law said, “Little fellow, I can’t do any more for you. I now want to take you by the hand and bring you to the cross of Christ. You are lost, and what you need is a Savior.” The purpose of the Law is to bring people to Christ—not to build them up so they can walk around claiming they keep God’s commandments.

God says mankind is lost and must be saved. This great truth has been surrendered today. But if we are honest, we all know down deep in our hearts something is wrong.

Still, people try to keep up a front. Author Ernest Hemingway, a great big swaggering type who shot wild game and followed bullfights, was said to have down under the surface “an undruggable consciousness that something was wrong.”

Gordon Lindsay, who studied Stone-Age people in New Guinea and Myanmar, concluded:

**The notion of primitive man possessing some inner peace which we civilized people have somehow lost and need to regain is a lot of nonsense. Your average New Guinea native lives not only in fear of his enemies but in terror-struck dread of the unknown. Malevolent spirits, especially those of ancestors, are all about him.**

We can never get away from what is down deep in our hearts. Dr. O. Hobart Mowerer, past president of the American Psychological Association, states:

**The Freudians, of course, recognize that guilt is central to Neurosis. But it is always the guilt of the future. It is not what the person has done that makes him ill but rather what he wishes to do but dares not. In contrast, the emerging alternative, or more accurately, the re-emerging one, is that**

**the so-called neurotic is a bona fide sinner. And his guilt is from the past and is real, and that his difficulties arise, not from inhibitions, but from actions which are clearly prescribed, socially and morally, and which have been kept carefully concealed, unconfessed and unredeemed.**

The only place to bring your sins and let go of your guilt complex, my beloved, is the cross of Christ. You don't have to put up a front, trying to appear better than you are. God says you are a sinner, and He gives you this remedy:

***“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”*** –Isaiah 1:18

Face reality. Be real. Be genuine. You may as well tell God about your sins—He already knows them all. He knows you through and through. Churches are full of people like the Pharisee who patted himself on the back by praying, “God, I thank You that I am not as other men are ...,” and then he began to brag about what he did (see Luke 18:9-14). Our Lord said such a man gets nowhere with God. His prayers die in the rafters.

Martin Luther said, “God creates out of nothing. Therefore, until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him.” When you realize this truth, you can be saved.

***Your best resolutions must wholly be waived;  
Your highest ambitions be crossed.  
You never need think you will ever be saved,  
'Til first you've learned you are lost.***

–Author unknown

Paul mentions three things faith in Christ does for us which the Mosaic Law, religion, and the church could never do.

# # 1 FAITH MAKES YOU A SON OF GOD

First, only faith in Christ can make us legitimate sons of God.

***For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.***

–Galatians 3:26

Notice the word is “sons,” not *children*. The Greek *huios* means “legitimate sons.” How do you become a legitimate son of God? By faith in Christ Jesus. There is no other way.

Back in the Old Testament, God doesn’t call the Old Testament saints “sons.” Israel as a nation was called a son, but individuals were not. Although David was a man after God’s own heart, God spoke of him as “David, my servant.”

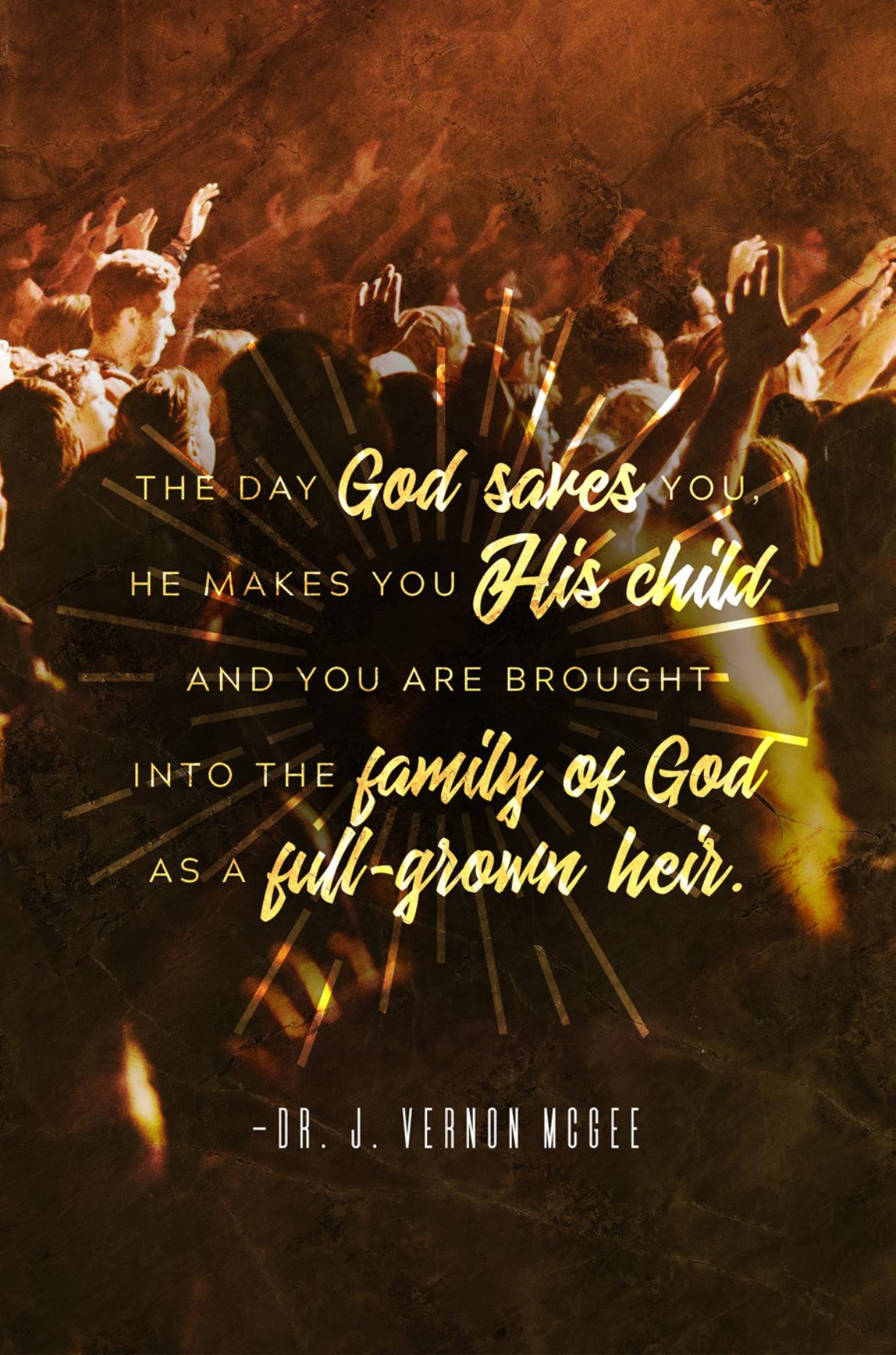
When our Lord confronted Nicodemus, He said, “You must be born again” (John 3:3). Nicodemus was genuine and obedient to the Law. As a Pharisee he fasted twice a week, gave a tenth of all he possessed, and did everything else required of a Pharisee.

He was religious to his fingertips, but our Lord said to him, “You can’t even see the kingdom of heaven until you have been born again. Religion won’t help you.”

The most damnable heresy today is teaching the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. That is *not* taught in the Word of God. Our Lord made it very clear when the religious Pharisees came to Him claiming, “We have one Father, even God.” He replied, “You are of your father the devil” (see John 8:41-44). Since Christ said that, evidently some can’t claim God as Father. In fact, a great many today are not His children. You become a child of God only through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the way you become a son of God:

***He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who [do no more nor less than simply] believe in His name. –John 1:11, 12***



THE DAY *God saves* YOU,  
HE MAKES YOU *His child*

— AND YOU ARE BROUGHT —  
INTO THE *family of God*  
AS A *full-grown heir.*

— DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

## #2 FAITH GIVES YOU THE POSITION OF A SON OF GOD

Faith in Christ does something else religion, the church, and the works of the Law cannot: Faith gives you the position of a son of God.

This is a little technical, but follow me closely—it will be worth it to understand this.

***Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all.*** –Galatians 4:1

The word for “child” is *nepios*, which means an immature child. As such, he is no different from a servant, “though he is master of all.”

Now let’s go back to the Roman home and look again at the little fellow born into a good family and cared for by a slave. If you saw him running around with the other children, you’d never

know he was the heir—the son of the head of the household. He grows up “under guardians and tutors until the time appointed by the father” (Galatians 4:2).

The age of accountability was not an established age level, but was determined by the individual father. Boys mature at different ages.

In a Roman home it worked something like this. Suppose the father is a centurion in Caesar’s army, gone for years at a time as the army advances the Roman Empire. Finally the father returns home. He goes in to shave, and all of a sudden he yells out, “Who’s been using my razor?” The servants tell him, “Your son.”

“You mean to tell me that boy is old enough to use a razor? Bring him here.”

By now he’s a fine strapping boy. His father says to him, “Well, now we must have the *toga virilis*. We’ll send out invitations to the grandmas, grandpas, aunts, and uncles.” So they all come for the ceremony of the *toga virilis*, and that day the father puts around the boy a toga, a robe.

That is what our Lord meant in His parable of the prodigal son: “Put the robe around him and a ring on his finger” (see Luke 15:22). The ring had on it the signet of his father, which was equivalent to his signature and gave him the father’s authority.

After that day, the boy walks down the street with that robe on. The servant better not say anything to correct him now, and he’d better not try to paddle him, either. The son has now reached the age of a full-grown son. That is what Paul meant when he said:

***Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world [under the Law]. But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*** –Galatians 4:3-5

Adoption in the Roman Empire was when the man took his own son and made him a full-grown son.

The day God saves you, He makes you His child and you are brought into the family of God as a full-grown heir.

That truth may not mean anything to you, but it means everything to me. I left for seminary with an awful inferiority complex. I was not brought up in a Christian home where I saw a Bible or heard a prayer—I knew nothing. And when I got to seminary, the other fellows knew it all—at least that’s the impression they gave me. I’ve never met so many smart fellows. They knew the Bible, could quote verses, and they were very pious too. I didn’t even know the books of the Bible, and it disturbed me. So I began to learn the books of the Bible.

**Dr. McGee wrote the book, *Briefing the Bible*, with outlines of every book of the Bible because he was determined to help others know every book of God's Word. Get your copy here.**



Then one day someone set me straight. I was not an inferior Christian but a full-grown son. Anything any mature saint could understand in the Word of God, I could understand because that mature saint needed the Holy Spirit to teach him just as much as I did. That was a tremendous revelation to me and a great comfort in those early days.

God brings us in as full-grown sons so we can understand spiritual truth. If you don’t understand it, it is your fault because He has made every arrangement for you! To me the greatest tragedy in our churches today is the number of Bible illiterates that fill the pews who are not able to find their way around the Bible in spite of how available it is to them.

Paul says,

***But as it is written, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” –1 Corinthians 2:9***

This verse is used at funerals with the idea that poor, dear So-and-so didn't hear or see much here, but he has gone up yonder where he can hear and see the things of God. Now I grant you that this truth is in the Bible—“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then, face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12)—but this is not what 1 Corinthians 2:9 is saying. God wants us to understand spiritual truths down here because “God has revealed them to us through His Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:10). Most of our learning comes through the ear-gate (what we hear), the eye-gate (what we see), and what the psychologist calls cognition. That is how we learn today. But if we are going to get divine truth, we will only get it because of His Spirit teaching it to us through our heart-gate.

***But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God .... But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. –1 Corinthians 2:10, 14***

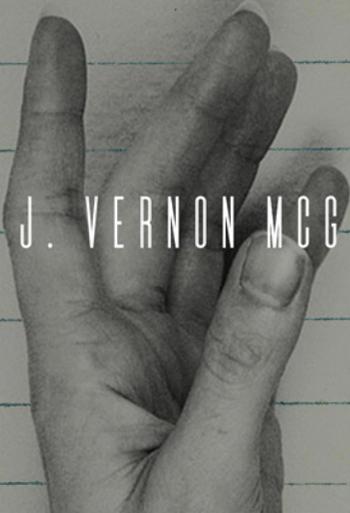


*Friend,*

JESUS CHRIST HAS DONE  
EVERYTHING FOR  
OUR SALVATION.

*When you trust Him*  
HE WILL SAVE YOU.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE



## #3 FAITH GIVES YOU THE EXPERIENCE OF A SON OF GOD

Faith in Christ, not works of the Law, gives the *experience* of sons of God. There are those today who think experience does not enter into salvation, that it has nothing to do with it at all. But if you're saved, faith in Christ will give you an experience.

Many of us tend to play down experience. However, a sadness has come over the saints today. Many need to have the experience of the Spirit of God making real in their lives the fact they are sons of God, that in spite of circumstances they are still children of God. I recognize the danger in experience. A little poem illustrates it:

*Three men were walking on a wall,  
Feeling, Faith, and Fact,  
When Feeling had an awful fall,  
And Faith was taken aback.  
So close was Faith to Feeling,  
He stumbled and fell too,  
But Fact remained and pulled Faith back,  
And Faith brought Feeling too.*

*—Author unknown*

But if you are a child of God through faith in Christ, there is an experience.

The believer never reaches the place of sinless perfection in this life. I wish we did. Being a pastor would be a lot easier if we had sinless perfection today. But we don't. We are always God's foolish little children, filled with ignorance, stubbornness, sins, fears, and weaknesses. We are never wonderful; *He* is wonderful. We never reach that place, but we do experience the Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

Paul says the Spirit of God cries, "Abba, Father"—

***And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"*** —Galatians 4:6

This word *Abba* was not translated. The translators (very wisely, I think) did not attempt to put it into English. It is too personal. It means "my daddy," and you don't talk that way about God, friend, regardless of how intimate you try to get with Him. He is high and holy. But the *Spirit of God* can do that. God's Spirit whispers the Father's nearness to the child of God. He does this especially in times of darkness and crises that come to us down here. John Paton, a missionary living among cannibals in the New Hebrides, told of how he buried his lovely wife with their newborn baby, and sat guard over the graves for days to keep the cannibals from digging up the bodies. He said, "I would have gone mad if Christ had not made Himself real to me."

My friend, in times of heartache, God will make Himself real to *you*.

When I was told I had cancer, I'll be honest with you—I couldn't believe it. Now I could believe that *you* could have cancer, but I never thought *I* could have it. I went to the hospital and lay down in a bed. I had been a preacher for many years, so countless times I'd gone into hospitals to visit my church people. I would pat them on the hand and say, "God will be with you." I prayed for them, and then I would walk out. But they had to stay there.

I will never forget when a preacher friend came to visit me that first evening. He prayed one of the most wonderful prayers I ever listened to, and how I appreciated it! Then he got up and left. But this time I was not walking out—I had to stay there. So I rolled over with my face to the wall and said, “Lord, I’ve been in this hospital a hundred times, and I’ve told everybody else to trust You. Now I want to know whether that’s real or not.” I want to testify to this, friend: He became real. There are multitudes of people who will testify to this, for they have had the same experience.

My friend, He gives the *experience* of being His child. The Law cannot give that to you, only faith in Christ can give it to you. This message is not milk for a baby Christian; this is meat.

You need to know in this hour that it is only faith in Christ that can save you—faith plus *nothing*. That’s the equation for salvation.

Paul concludes Galatians 4 with the strongest statement of all:

***Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son [that was Hagar and her son, Ishmael], for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. –Galatians 4:30, 31***

Hear me now, this is important! If you are trying to be saved by trusting Christ *plus* anything else, Paul says you are not saved.

***Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. –Galatians 5:2***

You can be saved only by trusting Christ completely. My friend, God has no arrangement for you to be saved by faith and by law; you have to choose one or the other. If you want to go by law, you can try it—but I’ll warn you God has already said you won’t make it. You can’t carry a spare tire by saying, “Well, I have church membership” or “I say my prayers.” My friend, if you are trusting

these things to get you to heaven, you are not saved—you *cannot* be saved by them. It is only when you look to this wonderful Savior and trust Him wholly and totally.

My friend, are you going to heaven? On what basis do you answer this? You have to decide whether you are going to trust Christ or whether you are going to try to make it another way. If you try another way, I say with Paul, “Christ shall profit you nothing.” But if you will trust Him, cast yourself upon Him and He will save you. You don’t have to *do* anything. Friend, Jesus Christ has done everything for our salvation. When you trust Him, He will save you.

It is wonderful to know you are saved by faith in Christ! That’s the way—the only way—He can save you.

It is faith plus *nothing*.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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