

Faith and the Christian Fight (Part 5)

Ask, Seek, Knock

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We are going to turn to a couple of very familiar scriptures in James 2:

James 2:20-24 But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? See you how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which said, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

These are very familiar scriptures, but perhaps because of our familiarity with them their significance is easily overlooked. Brethren, they teach us a major truth about the Christian way of life, and that is that though faith is its foundation, and grace is our means of deliverance, it is works that links the two together. This is because works provide the evidence that one has faith and that God's grace is indeed providing the means so that right works are produced.

In the four previous sermons of this series we found that Abel's witness to us is that of justification by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. Enoch's witness to us is of the nature of the justified person's faith. That nature is, simply stated, that because justification establishes a relationship with God, that person seeks God with all of his heart, striving to be like God in the image of Jesus Christ during the sanctification period of his converted life.

In my previous sermon in this series I gave you seventeen elements of Christian life that faith supports towards, or in, our walk with God. Its importance to our spiritual well-being cannot be overestimated. In that sermon we also saw that Noah, though given only one mention in one verse—Hebrews 11: 7—is spiritually not an insignificant example of the use of faith.

His example is especially significant to us because we, like him, are living in an end-time, but considering the factors of the time he lived through by faith, he did very well indeed, being ranked, it appeared, among the most righteous who have ever lived. He kept faith with God and accomplished a significant undertaking that consumed 120 years, and serves as an example to all.

Theologically, that one verse regarding him almost destroys all by itself a couple of faults of Christianity's favorite doctrines, and those are the "eternal salvation" and "no works" doctrines.

Hebrews 11: 7 shows that Noah's faith was not only used by him to motivate him to work, but that he was also rewarded by God for his labor by being saved from the Flood's destruction. That example is provided for us to follow and to have hope in, but we link it up with verse 6, and in order to follow it we must continuously seek God. The two are linked.

The purpose or reason for continuing to seek Him is to refine and upgrade our knowledge of His character, to broaden and deepen our personal relationship with Him, to really and truly know Him so that we might be conformed to ever more of His image. Never forget what Jesus said in John 17: 3—"To know God's eternal life." It is that important.

Seeking God takes work. It takes many sacrifices, but brethren, this work of seeking Him has become our vocation. In Ephesians 4: 1 Paul says this:

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called.

This appeal of his comes right on the heels of actually a very moving prayer he made for all of us that occupies most of chapter 3

A vocation is a work. It is an occupation. If you would look at the Greek there, the word that is translated "vocation" is actually the same word that is translated "calling" everywhere else, or in some modern Bibles it might say "summoned." The translators inserted the word "vocation" there because I think they understood how serious Paul was about the calling. It is something that has to be worked on.

Now how serious is this work supposed to be, and what profit is there in it for us since it is going to occupy a large portion of our life after we are called? What profit is there in doing this?

We are going to go to the book of Genesis. The setting of this verse is quite interesting.

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward.

In brief, the profit, or the reward of seeking God is that God gives Himself to the seeker! As God gives Himself, everything that He is, and that He will do, comes with Him. There could not be a greater reward for anything that is required of God in this life than to seek Him, because He gives Himself. What more could we ask for? "I am your reward."

This verse begins the introduction to the covenant that God made with Abraham. That comes a little bit later in the chapter. Chronologically, this verse falls right on the heels of Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek at the end of chapter 14. Something very interesting took place there right near the end of the chapter. On that occasion Abraham had clearly refused a reward from the king of Sodom for his act in the king's behalf when he went to rescue Lot.

His refusal of a reward from the king was an act of his faith in God that motivated him, because Abraham wanted to make sure that in his life God was providing everything. Abraham was in no way going to indebt himself to the unconverted. Abraham would not take a reward from the world and thus be obligated to it in any way. He was thus affirming that to him, God was everything important to life, and that he had done what he had done because at the time it was the right thing to do in order to rescue Lot.

Abraham made sure that the king of Sodom understood that the recovery of the king's wealth was merely a by-product of Lot's rescue, not its main purpose, making it very clear that he was not involved in this event in order to please that king or to gain the booty of war. His sole object was to rescue his nephew.

When chapter 15 begins, in verse 1 God confirms to Abraham that he made the right choice, and that He would indeed supply Abraham's every need, and because providing for him involved protecting him, He was also Abram's shield. Shield from what? You name it. Any curse that might come down the road, God would be there to, at the very least, deflect the worst of it, and maybe, at the most, completely turn it aside. Be it sickness, be it an army, be it a destruction from weather, or whatever, God was going to be his shield, and that guaranteed his prosperity.

We are going to go back to Hebrews 11: 4-7 again just to refresh our memory exactly what these verses say.

Hebrews 11: 4-7 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaks. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: [Was God's Enoch's shield too? You had better believe that He was!] for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

These verses containing the examples of the faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah are essential to our understanding of our relationship with God, as well as the remainder of the application by faith of the others whose names appear in Hebrews 11. The faith of those others, beginning with Abraham (after Noah, Sarah, Jacob, and so forth), was founded on those things we see in verses 4 through 7. That was part of their foundation.

Verse 6 contains the word "rewarder." But whom does He reward? The verse tells us. He rewards those who diligently seek Him.

We are going to go back to the Old Testament again to give a number of scriptures to help us understand some things regarding seeking God. The first one is in Psalm 9. This is a warning.

Psalm 9:16-17 The LORD is known by the judgment which he executes: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. [That Greek word "Higgaion" means "meditate." "Think on this."] The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

This warning is not aimed at those who deny God's existence. It is not aimed at atheists, but

rather it is aimed at those who know God, but forget Him, or overlook Him, or neglect Him in the course of daily life. Because of this, this verse applies to us directly. You cannot forget something you do not know. These people are those who resist the urgings of the Spirit.

You might recall what Paul said back in Ephesians. He said "to grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." People who are forgetful, people who are neglectful grieve the Holy Spirit. This verse in Psalm 9 is showing what causes God to be grieved, and that is, not rejecting Him outright, but simply neglecting Him. These are people who resist the urging of the Spirit to pay attention to spiritual responsibility. The responsibility of seeking God requires that we make Him the first priority of life.

There are scriptures that show the attitude He wants us to seek Him in, and He gives us these things for our spiritual well-being. The first one we are going to look at is very interesting. This is the chapter in which wisdom, which is really God, is personified.

Proverbs 8:17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.

One of the first things we need to know is that God requires reciprocity in the relationship with Him. This is very clear. He loves those who love Him. It is pretty hard to make it any clearer that reciprocity is a major term in our relationship with Him. This is a responsibility that comes with the grace given by Him and accepted by us.

I want you to notice the word "early." The Soncino is a Jewish commentary, and they translate the word "early" as "earnestly." We can put that right in there. "Those that seek me earnestly shall find me." You look a little bit harder at that word, a little bit more thoroughly, and you find out that it means "painstakingly." It means "seriously." It means "with intensity." So there are two broad meanings to this word, the most obvious one, the most literal one is like "early" in terms of a day; that is, at dawn. The secondary meaning, when activity is involved, that word intensifies what is going on within the sentence. It makes it serious.

That phrase also gives us a promise, that if we seek Him seriously, painstakingly, and with intensity, then He guarantees that we shall find Him.

The primary meaning of the word translated "early," which is the one the King James gives, indicates then that those who put Him first in their life shall find Him. At the dawn. The first they do when they get up is put God first. He will reveal Himself to them, and they shall come to know Him, and this leads to eternal life.

I am not done with the Soncino yet, because the commentary has an interesting comment on this verse. Their comment says this: "The sage [meaning the person who came up with this verse] recognizes to the full the moral responsibility and the potency of man [meaning man's awesome potential], the highest gift of life is within every man's grasp."

The highest gift in a man's life is eternal life, but the road that leads to eternal life is the seeking of God.

We are going to go now to Psalm 119 as an example. Whoever the author of Psalm 119 is says:

Psalm 119:10 With my whole heart have I sought you: O let me not wander from your commandments.

Here another example is given:

Psalm 27:4 One thing have I desired of the LORD that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

This verse is a confirmation actually of Proverbs 8:17 about seeking God painstakingly, and so forth. What it is doing here is revealing David's earnestness in seeking God. To him it was not a trifling affair. The desire, we can see here, is made with resolute serious, solemn and consistent fervor.

Interestingly, Isaiah spoke on this as well.

Isaiah 55:1-3 Ho, every one that thirsts [that thirsts after God, after God's Word] come you to the waters [meaning God's Word, God's Spirit], and he that has no money; come you, buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul [your life] delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

What is God telling us here? He is telling us that seeking Him can be accomplished without money. It is not something that is costly in a material way. Anybody can do it within their circumstance; however, it does not mean that it is not costly, because it *is* costly, but it is costly in other terms.

It requires considerable sacrifice of human nature that always wants to do something else and give itself to other priorities. Remember Proverbs 8:17 says that if we do this, we will find Him. This is because God's reward to the seeker is that He will reveal Himself in greater and greater detail while at the same time providing for every physical and spiritual need.

There is another benefit shown right in this context in verse 7.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

He will forgive us if we will keep in contact with Him, seeking Him. Now, as God shows, hardly anybody did this better than Noah, and he did this living in times like we are living in.

The reward aspect shown in Hebrews 11: 6 points back to Enoch and forward to Noah in verse 7. Both of them were rewarded for their works of seeking God by being delivered from death-dealing circumstances. This form of rewarding by God is really nothing more than a continuing expansion of His grace.

In other words, when He gives us grace and we respond by seeking Him, the grace continues to flow toward us. It enhances and expands His original revealing of Himself in His calling to us. It has to be this way because our relationship with Him must not be one-sided.

Think about relationships in human terms. Husbands and wives, think about your relationship with your spouse. Those of you who are thinking of being married, those of you who want to date with the opposite sex, think of your relationships in human terms. Have you ever been involved with another person, or group, or persons that you wanted to have a relationship with, but all the efforts to make the relationship work were done by you? It does not work. That is frustrating, to say the least, because you are going to feel rejected. If one side is all take, and the other side all give, it is a relationship that is going nowhere, and in marriage that ends in divorce.

You see, the very best relationships require reciprocity. That is why God said, at the first, "I love those who love Me." But He exhibits here throughout the first, in that He died for us while we were yet sinners. So He starts the ball rolling. He forgives us. He gives us of His Spirit, but He expects us to use that Spirit to develop a relationship. He wants the love to come back so that the relationship will grow.

So "grace and works" and "grace and reward" absolutely go together as necessary parts of the same process, but that process is the continuing development of a family relationship with God, and with our brethren as well. It is the process whose highest reward or benefit is salvation into God's family completely and totally by means of the resurrection.

The quality of the relationship is giving evidence that one belongs in the family, and as that person goes along in life, God continues to reward, or as one might say, "bless" that person. His greatest blessings are spiritual, given to continue to enhance the developing relationship. Remember, we are going to live with Him forever, and so He wants that relationship to grow.

Now how does He bless? He accepts us into His presence. He forgives us. He gives us knowledge of His character, and understanding of His will. He gives us wisdom to know what to do, a sense of well-being, peace of mind, vision to follow the path, protection from disaster, healing, providing in hundreds of circumstances, and on and on and on without end.

Grace and works are two sides of the same coin. They are no more inconsistent together, operating together, than God's high sovereignty and man's responsibility to that high responsibility. Here is God way up, and here is man way down here, and they are responsible to each other. Faith and works are not opposed to each other. They belong together, even though at first thought they may appear opposite, but there are a lot of things in the Bible that we might think at first glance do not belong together. I am going to show you one. It is in John 13. It comes in the chapter where Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Notice what He says.

John 13:13-16 You call me Master and Lord: and you say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

Here is the implication of this: Christ is, at one and the same time, both Lord and servant. He is our Boss. In one sense He is our servant, taking care of us. Both sides of the same coin. These are no more inconsistent with each other than grace and works.

In the church fellowship a person can and should be both a brother and a servant. Now faith is the motivating foundation. Works are its effect. In a family, parents are actually in a position similar to that of God in relation to their children, but at the same time they are also servants to the children. They take care of them.

Let us go to Colossians 3:22. This is one you probably have to think about, but I am going to give it to you anyway.

Colossians 3:22-24 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for you serve the Lord Christ.

We are to work hard, because we serve Christ. We are to work as though everything in salvation depends on what we do, and yet on the other hand we know, and we know that we know, that salvation is something given. It cannot be earned. So salvation, Hebrews 11:6 confirms it, is at one and the same time both a gift from God and a reward to the Christian who works.

Now what if either one of them is missing? What if grace is missing? If God does not give grace, there is nothing for the worker to receive. On the other hand, if the person does not work, there is no basis for him to receive anything. This is why Christ makes some interesting statements from here to there. I am going to read one of them.

Matthew 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity.

They did nothing. No salvation there. But would He say the same thing to somebody who had received grace and *did* work? No, He would not.

Look how clear this next scripture is. Does Jesus want us to work? Here is a command.

John 6:27 Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat

which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him has God the Father sealed.

This is the one who works toward that end. Those who follow Christ have to work.

This next one is kind of interesting.

Luke 13:24 Strive to enter in [to the Kingdom of God] at the strait [or the difficult] gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able.

What He does here is He gives a pretty good measure of the intensity required to enter in at the difficult gate. You can connect this one to Proverbs 8:17 again, because it involves intensity. That word translated "strive" literally means, in the Greek, "agonize." Now soften it just a little bit, as modern translations have done. They have translated that single word into "make every effort."

By not producing the right fruit, which is what He addressed in Matthew 23, or neglectfully doing nothing at all, both are considered by God as iniquity, or lawlessness.

Despite the obvious requirement for the Christian to do works, in spite of the fact that most of the time the requirements seem to push us to our limits of patience, or energy, or spiritual abilities, it always must be understood by us that in this life one will never, despite all of his effort, ever earn salvation. The question then is, "Why?" Well, we shall see, as we go along, because what God the Creator does is trigger everything. We are required only to respond. We shall go on and expound this further.

Remember what Paul said in Philippians 2:12-13. He said, "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do." This is why we must constantly seek Him; not seeking to find Him, but seeking to know so that we might gain knowledge of Him, understand, and then respond by faith to do the right works.

Our works will never be meritorious enough to earn what He is giving us. He rewards us because it is His character to do so. He does so because it is good for us. His reward corrects, purifies, changes, encourages, and strengthens those who seek Him. His reward always has purposes far beyond something merely earned.

Luke 11:5-13 And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give you. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity [persistence] he will rise and give him as many as he needs. And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and

you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Remember, I said that God keeps the grace flowing toward those who are seeking Him.

What we have here is a very familiar principle that has searching meaning on this subject regarding faith and works. One of the major themes of the Sermon on the Mount, in which this instruction also appears near its very end, is God's providence. We are not in the Sermon on the Mount right here. In other words, what I am saying is that what we are talking about here appears in both places.

All three of the imperatives—ask, seek, and knock—imply using one's faith, trusting God to supply our need, our means. In Luke 11 it appears the subject is prayer. Persevering prayer is a work that is required of Christians. Jesus used this same admonition in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 when the subject is judging. Judging righteous judgment is another work required of Christians.

Asking, seeking, and knocking are all forms of works of inquiring into by faith for the purpose of gaining something one does not have. That is very clear right in the illustration. The guy did not have any bread. He wanted some bread and so he started asking.

What Jesus did here in this parable is that He arranged these imperatives—ask, seek, and knock—in a gradually rising scale of intensity, and He assures us that God will reward those who do as He says, providing for their need whether that need is small or even as great as salvation itself.

We are going to look at these three words now. The first one is "ask." Watch as the intensity gradually rises.

Asking implies humility and the consciousness of a need. The act of asking carries the sense of an inferior petitioning a superior. The one asking is expressing his need, and is thus the inferior. The one asked suggests having the ability to give, and thus in this case is the superior. In a different circumstance, the position of the two people may be reversed, but the one asking is inferior. The one who has the power that is needed is the superior.

It is interesting, that in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Publican which appears in Luke 18, the Pharisee, in his prayer, asked God for nothing. Zilch. Nada. Rather, he tells God how good he is. "I fast twice in the week," etc., etc. On the other hand, the Publican pleads with God for the mercy he needs because he is well aware that he is a sinner.

The very fact that one asks presupposes some measure of faith, because we are *asking* God, with whom we can at least have some level of fellowship. This sort of communication indicates

that there is already a relationship, so asking points toward, at the very least, the expectation of an answer. So when you ask somebody, you are pretty sure there is going to be some kind of an answer.

The next one—seeking—elevates the intensity a little bit. Seeking is asking, plus acting. You do not seek by doing nothing. Jesus is telling us straight out that asking by itself is not enough. We must also be endeavoring to obtain what it is that we are asking for. I know that you all have heard the proverb that "God helps those who help themselves." This is true. It is biblically true.

John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

I will say something about that in just a second.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Let us say that you ask God for knowledge, or understanding, or wisdom. Taking Jesus' instruction there, if we expect to receive an answer we had better also be doing some searching for them on our own through study and meditation. I will give you an example. Solomon asked for understanding, but at the same time the scriptures also show that he searched for and he collected thousands of proverbs. Do you get the point? "Seek" is to ask *and* do something about it. So, if we ask for forgiveness, are we actively at the same time striving to stop the sins that we are aware of? If we asked for healing, are we seriously working to improve our health problem on our own? If we ask for a job, are we also diligently looking for one?

Matthew 7:21 Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Jesus said those who ask *and* do will be in the Kingdom. That ratchets it up a little notch.

Number three is "knock" and it adds another dimension to Jesus' principle here. The principle becomes: ask, plus acting, plus persevering.

The word picture in Luke 11 is of someone standing at the door and having to knock, knock, knock; knock, knock, knock; knock, knock, knock until finally the guy gets up out of his bed and, maybe out of frustration, answers the door, and says, "Hey! I'll give you bread. Quit knocking!" You see, "knock" indicates persistence, persevering through the difficulty.

One commentator I looked at added something here I think is kind of interesting. He said that all three of these imperatives—ask, seek, knock—are written in the present tense, and with the context then he suggests that a possible translation for Jesus' instruction here could be: "Continue to ask. Continue to seek. Continue to knock." Notice how Jesus reinforced this in Luke

18: 1.

Luke 18:1 And he spoke a parable unto them to this end that men ought always to pray and not to faint [or to not give up].

Luke 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

So do not lose heart. Keep at it. This is something that threads its way through many portions of the Scriptures.

Romans 12:12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Did you notice that each imperative—ask, seek, and knock—is followed by the certainty of a promise? "Ask, and it shall be given." "Seek, and you shall find." "Knock, and it shall be opened." So overall, Jesus is encouraging us to do each one of these works—asking, seeking, knocking—and be persistent about it. Do not be a nag, but on the other hand, keep it up. "Well God, here I am again." Sometimes you feel rather silly, like we are a nag, but He says to keep it up.

Now one little cautionary thing. Even if we do this, it does not mean that we will always get what we ask for, what we want, because when other factors from other places in the Scripture are added to this, we are led to understand that God will always answer, and He will always give us what we need, but not necessarily what we ask for because what we ask for might not be good for us. It might not be good at the time. Later on maybe, but right now, not so good. So persistent prayer is a work of faith, and it is a work of diligently seeking Him even as Abel, Enoch, and Noah did, and it will, brethren, be rewarded.

Since, in this sermon, we are focusing on Hebrews 11: 7 and Noah, who kind of slipped to the background, from here on in we are going to be on Noah because he put these principles to work. Of that I am absolutely sure, or he would not rank so high on God's standard of righteousness. Verse 7 focuses on Noah's faith, work, and his reward for that work. Now here is a question. Would Noah have been saved without God's grace?

Genesis 6:5-8 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repents me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes

of the LORD.

This sets the stage for Noah's calling, and this stage, if we would read the whole context, would be filled with a never-ending, violent wickedness that includes Noah and his family, because it must be understood that Noah and his family in no way *earned* this calling and God's grace. In one sense, he was just an ordinary Joe, not particularly evil; in fact he may have been what the Bible calls an upright man, but he was a sinner too. And so it says in Romans 3: 10 "There is none righteous, no, not one." That includes Noah.

So like everyone else, Noah's calling was totally to do to God's purposes and actions. So the answer to the question is "No." If God had not given Noah grace there would have been no salvation, because Noah was not righteous enough to have earned that grace. This is the beginning of what I said earlier, that everything that God does triggers what man does. Without God's grace Noah would not have been saved from the Flood. That then sets the stage for a second question. Would Noah have been saved without his work of building the ark?

We know that God is pretty merciful, pretty kind, pretty generous, but I do not think we can be quite as positive with an answer to this question, but the answer seems to be very strongly "No" once again.

Let me just ask you another question. Is God going to reward people for doing evil? In America we do that. Illegals stream across the border, and we want to make them welcome and give them citizenship. We reward people for doing evil. God would never do such a thing.

I want to turn to another scripture. I want you to see how far this reaches. I have quoted this scripture a couple of different times. It is in the Parable of the Talents.

Matthew 25:24-26 Then he which had received the one talent [a gift of God's grace] came and said, Lord, I knew you that you are a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the earth; lo, there you have that is yours. His lord answered and said unto him, You wicked and slothful servant, you knew that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed.

Doing nothing with God's gift is wicked. This is how important works are. When God gives us the opportunity, He expects us to respond to that. "You wicked and lazy person" is a very strong term. This is why Hebrews 11: 7 gives the "no works" people serious theological problems. Now why? Because they know the principle that is contained within this verse must be applied to everyone's salvation, not just Noah's. Everybody's.

In other words, nobody is saved without works. Everyone called of God, like Noah, to receive grace, does not deserve the calling. They are called from a world teeming with wickedness, and thus everyone has to do the works of righteousness in order to build his own personal ark just like Noah did.

Genesis 6:14-22 Make you an ark of gopher wood; rooms shall you make in the ark, and shall pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which you shall make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shall you make to the ark, and in a cubit shall you finish it above; and the door of the ark shall you set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shall you make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breadth of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die. But with you will I establish my covenant; and you shall come into the ark, you, and your sons, and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shall you bring into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto you, to keep them alive. And take you unto you of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to you; and it shall be for food for you, and for them. Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

This links to Hebrews 11:7 because it tells there that Noah *moved with fear*. This was the effect in Noah of his faith, his believing God. I mean the *moving* part. It is what came with the grace. The Greek phrase in Hebrews 11 translated "moved with fear" is unusual because it covers everything from being cautious, wary, even suspicion, to acting with holy reverence, and so the word "fear" is used, and it is covering a whole lot of turmoil that might have been going through Noah.

I feel certain that God intends for us to understand that phrase—"moved with fear" across the whole spectrum, because the believing Noah would undoubtedly have had a certain degree of fright motivating the desire to save himself and his family from a destruction he believed was going to occur, and at the same time, I am sure, he would have felt overwhelmed. "How in the world am I going to do this?" Can you *imagine* that? And yet at the same time he overcame those things, and he followed the God-given impulse to deeply respect God's word to him, and so he took action, as verse 22 states.

The effect of the grace given was his belief in the warning, and his action taken is that the ark was built, and his family's lives were saved. There is formula there, but the whole story is not told yet.

Philippians 4:13, 19 I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. . . But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

This does not mean that one can do anything that one wants to. It means though that God will

supply all of our need within the project that He has us working on. Let us tuck on a few examples of Noah's needs for building the ark.

We are going to go back to Genesis 6. We have just read these verses, but we will read them again.

Genesis 6:13-16 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make you an ark of gopher wood; rooms shall you make in the ark, and shall pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which you shall make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shall you make to the ark, and in a cubit shall you finish it above; and the door of the ark shall you set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shall you make it.

Are you aware that it was not until the 20th century that men built a ship of this size? The ark was a big boat. Actually it was just a big barge, but nonetheless it was a big, big project.

I think that there is enough given here for us to understand, especially when we understand Philippians 4:13-19 about "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," Noah is a good example of that. Had he ever built a boat before? No. There is no indication that he had ever built a boat. There is no indication it ever rained until that time. There is no real indication anybody had *ever* built a boat. How are you going to do something that had never been done before? That is a distinct possibility. Maybe yes, maybe no, but we can at least take it that far.

So what did God have to supply Noah with? This is showing that God is giving us just enough to know that He supplied him with a design. How did He do this? Did God say, "Well, I just happen to have these blueprints with Me. Here they are." No. That is not the way that God shows us He works. "Ask." "Seek." "Knock." Noah probably hit his forehead. "What am I going to do?" You can be sure he asked God, "How about giving me a better design?"

I think we can be pretty sure that as Noah was seeking for that he got out the pen and the paper and he started drawing things. Maybe there was somebody in the village, somebody in the city, somebody in the town Noah would have probably sought out—those of an engineering mind who might have been able to assist him. We can also be sure, that since God says if you ask, you shall receive, and if you seek, you shall find, and if you knock, it will be opened up to you, that God would be there inspiring somebody to come up with a design to help him.

Noah had to go through the same processes with everything. Where was he going to get the labor force? Where was he going to get the nails, the pegs, the glue, whatever it took to build a wooden barge? This was a huge project. It is no wonder it took him 120 years to do this. Besides that, he might have had a job on the side preaching. He was called "a preacher of righteousness."

Maybe Shem was a good engineer. Maybe one of the other ones was good working with wood,

and somebody else in the family had something else, and so Noah could reach out, but he had to use his mind. He had to work asking, seeking, and knocking, and God kept responding, and He gave Noah what he needed. But you can see the project took 120 years. It was not something that God responded to within a week's time with everything Noah needed to build that boat. You can be sure He really tested Noah's patience and his persistence and all the persecution he had to put up with while that was going on. There must have been a great, great deal of it.

Now there were some things that were beyond Noah's capability, and those things God miraculously took care of. God brought the animals to the ark. I can image that would be something that if Noah tried to do it himself it would be like trying to herd a bunch of cats. Did you ever try to do something like that? Cats just go in every direction they want to. That is really frustrating. Sheep you can herd. Goats you can herd. They are a little harder than sheep to herd, but with cats, impossible! You just have to grab them and make them go where you want them to go.

I want you to notice a specific verse now in Genesis 8: 1.

Genesis 8:1 And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged.

It is that series of words—"God remembered Noah." Now consider their helplessness. Even though that term appears when the Flood was already on, "God remembered Noah" has the sense of going all the way back to when this thing began, in the midst of all the confusion and wickedness and violence before God ever gave Noah the grace. What God is saying here is that, regardless of the stage that this was taking place, God remembered Noah. He was responding to Noah as Noah worked this thing out.

When they got on the Flood waters it became especially important, because it not only poured huge volumes of water from the heavens, but also there were geologic forces at work. The earth was moving around. The fountains of the great deep indicate tremendous earthquake activity in which huge land masses moved against each other, forcing underground reservoirs of water to spout above ground. Since water seeks its own level, massive torrents of it would be roaring downward into the valleys like Category 5 rivers, sweeping everything before them.

There is no indication that the ark had an engine, a mast, a sail, a rudder, or even a wheel for navigation. It was just a huge barge built for floating, and was always at the mercy of the torrent. The Flood was exceedingly tumultuous, but God was there, and He was giving His special attention to the work He gave Noah to do.

So what do we have here? God called Noah. God gave the warning. God gave Noah the design. God supplied him with the material. God supplied the laborers. God brought the animals, and made sure they were in the ark. God closed the door. God brought the Flood. God preserved them during the Flood in a barge that had no means of steering, no mast, nothing. The Eternal was there. Do you get the point? He is with us in the same way.

I Corinthians 3:5-10 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he that waters are one; and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: you are God's husbandry, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon.

What this means in regard to Noah is that Noah made excellent use of the means which God prescribed and provided for His purposes, beginning with the grace given. In like manner, we are workers together with God, but God alone gives the increase in His project involving us. All of this together produced Noah's salvation. Let us bring this right down to our salvation.

II Corinthians 6:1 We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain.

We are workers together with Him, but at the same time we can receive the grace of God in vain, meaning uselessly, nothing accomplished. Noah did not. For what if Noah, after receiving grace and his warning, decided the project was too much bother, too big, and besides it had never even rained. What if he had said, "I think I will just rely on God's grace"? Not good. What if he had allowed himself to be distracted? It was an end-time. An awful lot was going on.

Do you get the picture? No work, no ark, no salvation. Noah dies.

Turn now to II Corinthians 5. Here, brethren, is our ark.

II Corinthians 5:21 For he has made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

The key word for this sermon is "made." It indicates creation. The ark was created. Our ark is righteousness—the righteousness of God, that we become the righteousness of God.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

"Grace" is Paul's collective term that encompasses many aspects of God's freely-given kindnesses. To those of us astute enough to think about grace, it is a gift that teaches us. It teaches us four huge truths.

(1): It teaches us in what manner and attitude we must conduct our life righteously and godly.

(2): It teaches us that we must live looking forward to Christ's return. In other words, a Christian becomes a visionary.

(3): It teaches us about iniquity and redemption. Another way of saying that is that it teaches the Christian to be deeply appreciative of what he is rescued from.

(4): It teaches us that we must zealously do good works as prescribed by God. Another way of saying that is that it teaches us to respond as a living sacrifice, pleasing God.

Noah created an ark that provided a physical means of deliverance from his end-time tribulation, and we are working to be created in Christ Jesus, created in His spiritual character-image. It is this creation that will prove to be our deliverance from our end-time tribulation.

God's grace carries us through the entire operation from beginning to end. Noah's ark and our righteousness are built only because of God's gifts of grace. God remembers us, even as He did Noah. Though our works are necessary for this creation, nobody will ever be able to honestly claim that he did it on his own, or that he was owed. All one does is cooperate. Grace and works absolutely belong together. Grace and faith are the cause. Works are the effect, and the two together produce salvation into God's Kingdom.