

JJ¹

As a kid, I would sometimes watch *Leave It To Beaver*. They were reruns, of course! For you kids who don't know the show, it was a show about a young boy with the nickname "Beaver" who always got into some kind of mischief or jam whether he meant to or not. The attitude was, "Leave it to Beaver to do something like that, or to have something like that happen."

Sometimes people feel the same way about God and his Word. "Leave it to God to be confusing, unfair, demanding, uncaring, etc." To a degree, that kind of reaction may be true, but it's no fault of God's, just our own because of our own weakness and lack of faith. Today our Lord speaks to us with perfect clarity about the heart and core of Christianity. When it comes to the sacrifice for sin, attaining eternal life, and the gift of faith, we need to **LEAVE IT TO GOD.**

The words before us today are some of the most well known and cherished words in Scripture. This is the case because they're like the words of John 3:16 found in our Gospel today. Words that so simply summarize the heart and core of our faith. While preparing for this sermon, I kept looking at these words and thought, "Why would you ever want to preach on these words? They're so clear, so beautiful, so concise, you should

just read them out loud again and then just say 'Amen!'" Yet we have to keep coming back to these words and slow down to take them to heart because what these few short verses say totally run against what our sinful hearts think and are therefore words that so many mess up or don't truly take to heart.

"But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! He also raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He did this so that, in the coming ages, he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

We are saved by God's grace alone. We cannot help one little bit. We can't build up enough good to balance out our evil. God says "be perfect" so there has to be a big zero on the side of sin and 100 in perfection. That's impossible for us since we already start life with the deficit of original sin which we inherited from our parents. Because of this, there is also no possible way for you to make any decision for Christ on your own. Yet this

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

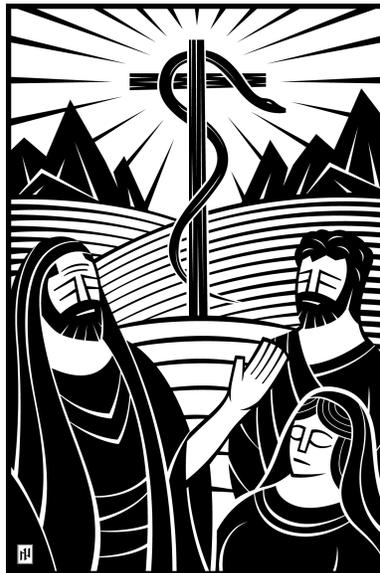
is what many in this world believe and teach. Billy Graham was one of those people.

I watched a good chunk of the special last Sunday night on Billy Graham. In it, Billy Graham discussed how at the end of one service early on in his traveling career he decided to hold his first altar call. The time where he would invite people to come forward and make their decision for Christ. In his interviews he admits this was his idea. He chose to do it. And when more and more people came each time, he decided to keep up with it. He didn't have a command from God. It was based on outward success. But just because something is outwardly successful doesn't mean you should do it, especially when that action is not only absent from the pages of Scripture, but condemned by the very words before us today.

If this is something you think you can do or have done, that you made a decision for Christ yourself, then you need to take a step back and take another look at what God says in his Word. Paul writes, "God...made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved!" By nature, we all are dead in our transgressions and

sin. Dead plants, animals and people don't do anything for themselves but rot away into destruction. So too with a dead soul. Dead is dead is dead. That's why we need to **LEAVE IT TO GOD**. He's the one who makes us spiritually alive in every way.

Paul nails down what it means to be saved by grace through faith: "Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."



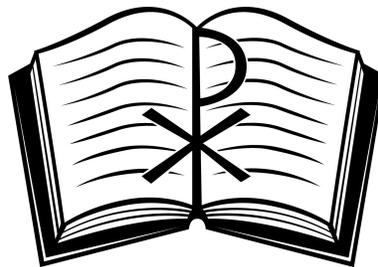
Notice how Paul describes by grace through faith with three unmistakable statements: 1) not from yourselves; 2) it is the gift of God; 3) not by works. Notice that the two negative statements apply to us humans. When we try to supply, when we try to help, when we try to earn, the result is always negative. It doesn't work.

We ruin it. Only God can do it and have it turn out positive. It's God's gift to us, so **LEAVE IT TO GOD**.

Yes, the forgiveness of sins, freedom from the power of the devil, and the promise of eternal life are God's free gift to us. Now I know what your soggy noodle is saying, "Nothing in this world is free!" And in a way, you're right. God's grace, this gift cannot be found in this world.

God's grace, while free for us, was not free for God. God's gift of grace came from outside this world and lived among us. Jesus came into this world to be our Savior, and it cost him dearly to be that Savior. Where our works cannot save us, Jesus' works do. Where even our own death could not appease God, Jesus' death has.

"Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." The Bible cannot stress too much that our salvation, our rescue from the guilt of our sin, the power of the devil and death (the curse of sin), is all God's free gift to us. Maybe at some point in your life you received a gift from someone that you know came at great personal expense or sacrifice for the person who gave it to you. You probably felt unworthy of that person's great love. Yet that's why they gave the gift to you, because they love you. So too with our Savior God. Salvation truly cost God everything. He gave his Son to suffer for all of your wickedness. Through his sacrifice, he has paid off the debt of your sin and won eternal life for you. It's all far more than any of us deserve. We all are unworthy of such a great love. Yet that's the love God has for you! That is why he freely gives it to you!



And what emphasizes that this is all a gift from God is also how all its benefits are made our own personally. We are saved by grace *through faith*. Now understand that faith is not your creation. **LEAVE IT TO GOD.** Faith is what God gives to you in order to personally connect you to the salvation he has already accomplished on your behalf through his Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Faith is the gift God gives you so that you would believe this truth and then also live the new life he has given you to live.

Paul describes this new life, saying: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them." Our good works are our response to God's grace in our lives. As redeemed children of God, we want to give thanks.

And in these good works there is no room for boasting on our part. You can't say to yourself, "I know God loves me because of what I do." You can't say, "I know I'm better than other people because of the good I do." That's foolish boasting when you consider God's Word to us today. None of those works are really yours anyways. We are God's workmanship. He crafted us. He created us to do good works. A hammer can't be proud about pound and pulling nails. It's

just doing what it was created to do. So too with us. And on top of it all, all those good things you do or ever could do, they've all been prepared in advance by God for you to do. Yet every one fills him with joy as you do it out of love for him.

LEAVE IT TO GOD to be confusing, unjust, unfair, demanding, uncaring, etc. Sometimes we let our sinful nature get the better of us and we start to think this way. Better to say, leave it to us to doubt God and his Word. Leave it to us to forget to listen to him and take him at his Word. But thank God we get to **LEAVE IT TO GOD** to forgive those sins too! And how wonderful to know that God doesn't roll his eyes at us and say, "Here we go again..." Instead, they're eyes always filled with love, forgiveness and free grace. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

Artwork by Ian M. Welch—Copyright 2013 Ian M. Welch. All Rights Reserved. paramentics.com

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is taken from: The Holy Bible, Evangelical Heritage Version™ (EHV™) copyright © 2016 The Wartburg Project. All rights reserved. www.wartburgproject.org