

Bill, a friend of our family for many years, was in complete renal (kidney) failure. He needed a transplant to save his life and the doctors said he needed to find a donor quickly. Many of his family members stepped up to the plate, were tested, hoping they would be able to save Bill's life. Not a single match was found.

When Bill's friends learned of his plight many of them were tested, hoping they would be a match and be able to save Bill. Again, after many tests, many hopeful weeks, not a single person who had been tested was the match needed to make this transplant a success.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a complete stranger, one who learned of Bill's condition because of a special prayer for Bill at an assembly worship period, decided he would be tested. Unbelievably, this stranger was a perfect match. With little hesitation, this stranger made the decision to donate one of his kidneys. He made his wishes known to the doctors, the transplant was completed and Bill is now healthy and happy and lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

Can you imagine the emotion, the overwhelming feelings that were exhibited between Bill and the stranger when they first met? Bill literally has part of that stranger's body in his own and the result is a saved life, a family who still has their father when almost all hope was gone, and a new appreciation for a concept the Bible describes as GRACE.

According to my on-line dictionary, grace is defined as "free and unmerited favor." So, grace is free and undeserved. One cannot earn grace, work for grace, or deserve grace. Grace is truly the most amazing concept in all of God's word.

As you think about Bill's situation is there any scenario you can think of that could convince you that Bill earned, worked for or deserved his new kidney? Before you say NO, think about this. Bill had to go to the hospital and he had to undergo many tests. He had to agree to accept this stranger's kidney. He had to go through a life-threatening surgery. He had to put his faith and trust in the doctor's who were performing the surgery. He had to pay for the hospital bills and he continues to pay for and take medicine that keeps his body from rejecting the kidney. So, I say, YES, Bill earned his new life.

Bill had to expend a great deal of energy; time, effort and money for this transplant to become a reality. So, the fact that he expended this energy, jumped through all the medical hoops, and actually paid the bills, proves that Bill's actions amounted to WORK and, therefore, Bill actually saved himself through his own actions.

"Wait just a minute," you might be thinking. "Lou, as writer of this column you are nuts. Bill did nothing to earn, deserve or work for his kidney. Bill simply had to ACCEPT the kidney. Just because he was required to put forth some effort in the process in no way means he earned or deserved the kidney. You will never get me to believe he did."

Well then, what about this scenario? Here is Bob. The Bible says the standard for Bob's life is perfection. "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:48) But Bob's dilemma is defined in Romans. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) "There is none righteous, not even one." (Rom. 3:10) Then the big bombshell comes in

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death.” So Bob definitely has earned something for his lack of perfection, spiritual DEATH.

So, Bob decides he wants to do something about his spiritual condition. He begins to read the Bible. He reads the entire passage of Rom 3:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Bob is elated. “Eternal life is FREE, it’s a gift of God. But how can I get this gift,” Bob is thinking.

Then Bob finds Eph. 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Bob is now ecstatic. “I can be saved from spiritual death, by something called GRACE, it’s a gift from God himself and God won’t even make me work for it. It’s FREE, it’s a GIFT.”

“I need to read more,” thinks Bob. So Bob finds Eph. 1:7-8 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.” “So, I am forgiven by GRACE through the BLOOD of Jesus,” Bob learns. “How does that work?”

Continuing his reading, Bob discovers Rev. 1:5, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” “So how can I be washed in the blood of Jesus,” Bob asks as he looks in his concordance for the word washed. He discovers the answer in Acts 22:16 (NIV) “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”

“Now I understand,” thinks Bob. “The WHAT that saves me is the BLOOD of Jesus, the WHERE am I washed in the blood is in baptism, and it’s FREE because of GRACE.”

“Wait, just a minute,” you might be thinking as a reader of this column. “If one has to be baptized to be washed in the blood and to receive forgiveness of sins, salvation then becomes a WORK and it no longer is a gift because one must do something in order to receive it.”

Question. Did Bill earn his life when he ACCEPTED the stranger’s kidney? Did Bill WORK for his life when he went through the operation or did Bill simply receive the kidney as an expression of the stranger’s GRACE?

Reenacting the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus through immersion and thereby ACCEPTING the gift of salvation as sins are washed away by the BLOOD of Christ, is simply God’s way of bestowing His GRACE. It’s no more a WORK than Bill ACCEPTING the stranger’s kidney.

Think about it!

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