

## The Problem With Santa Claus

***“You’d better watch out, you’d better not cry, You’d better not pout I’m telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town. He’s making a list, checking it twice, gonna find out who’s naughty or nice; Santa Claus is coming to town! He sees you when you’re sleeping, He knows when you’re awake, He knows if you’ve been bad or good; so be good for goodness sake!”***

- Christmas is **helpful or beneficial** for parents!
- With all of the headaches of shopping, decorating and entertaining comes a bonus.
- They get the chance ***to threaten*** their kids **into good behavior.**
  - ***“If you don’t quit crying, Santa Claus won’t bring you anything!”***
  - ***“Pick up your toys and clean your room or Santa won’t bring you anything new to play with.”***
  - ***“Go to bed and get to sleep or Santa won’t come tonight.”***

Did you ever wonder about a guy who ***“sees you when you’re sleeping?”***

- What does he have, x-ray vision?
- Maybe he uses all those security cameras that are in stores, and even at intersections.

And **what about this list of his?** Is he the final arbitrator on what is ***“naughty or nice?”***

And while we are asking questions, how about asking a few more?

- How does he make it around the entire world in 24 hours?
- How can he be in all the malls (and in two or three places in some malls) all at the same time?
- How does he get into my house seeing I don’t have a chimney?
- And finally, how old is this guy, anyway?

**Let’s look at the evidence:**

- He knows everything there is to know about each of us.
- He is everywhere at the same time.
- He has the ability to give us anything our heart’s desire.
- He keeps a list of all those who are “good.”

He is ***the one who judges*** our every deed.

- Hmmm, sounds like someone else we know-
- ***Except we might use terms like*** omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, eternal, the “Lamb’s book of life”, and the “White Throne Judgment.”

I am not going to be so naive as to equate Santa with God.

Some ultra-fundamentalists may look at Santa as a pagan intrusion and **an assault on truth**.

But what I would like to do this morning is to point you to another, ***potentially more dangerous myth-that is***, the idea that ***we must earn the good things that we receive***.

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For the sake of this lesson, I’ll call it ***“THE PROBLEM WITH SANTA CLAUS.”***

***The whole idea behind Santa is that you must be good in order to receive presents***

- Those who are good will receive much,
- While those who are “naughty” will be singing “I’m Getting’ Nuttin’ for Christmas.”

**Too many Christians have the same opinion of God.**

- **They feel that if they do all the things they are supposed to do,**
- **God will bless them.**
- **If they live the way they are supposed to live they will make it to heaven.**

***I just recently saw a church sign that asked the question “Are you good enough to go to heaven?”***

In a poll of the Lutheran Missouri Synod, a vast majority of clergy expressed the viewpoint that if they did what was right, **they would have eternal life**.

I found this particularly interesting since Martin Luther was a driving force behind the Protestant Reformation who’s main thrust was to refute this very idea!

**Another large percentage of clergy denies the whole idea of hell or eternal punishment.** Similar responses are found across many denominational lines. I trust that before we are through we will understand that our works will never get us to heaven, and that we must rely totally on the grace of God.

**We will not make it any other way!**

- We will also look at the role of “good works” in a Christian’s life.
  - Let’s not make the “Problem with Santa Claus” the “Problem with Serving God.”
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**Ephesians 2:8-10** – <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

**Contemporary English Version** - <sup>8</sup> You were saved by faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve. This is God’s gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own. <sup>9</sup> It isn’t something you have earned, so there is nothing you can brag about. <sup>10</sup> ***God planned for us to do good things and to live as he has always wanted us to live. That’s why he sent Christ to make us what we are.***

**Paul makes it abundantly clear that we are saved by grace.**

- In fact, although he states that **we are saved by faith**, he places **the origin of faith with grace.**
- In other words, **it is the grace of God** that allows us to have faith in the first place!
- **Grace gives us the faith to believe unto salvation.**
- That faith **is not** of ourselves, **it is the gift of God.**

**Grace has been defined as “Unmerited Divine Favor.”**

- **It is God** working in us **even though we don’t deserve it.**
- I realize this is a heavy subject during this busy holiday season,
- But we must guard against becoming legalistic **in our walk with God.**

- When we place our salvation anywhere ***but in the grace of God***, we **become no different** than the Pharisees Jesus scathingly rebuked.
- ***This Christian life*** is a life of balance, and we must have a balanced theology behind a balanced lifestyle.

That is why we must understand **what grace is** and **what grace does**.

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**First, let's establish a firm foundation:**

**Man's plight can be summed up in these few statements:**

**Man was created in God's image and given a free will to serve God or self.**

***Genesis 1:27 - So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.***

- ***Man sinned***, corrupting the image and bringing himself under the bondage of sin.
- This corruption, or depravity, **separated man from God**.
- **Sin caused death** to enter the world, **the curse came** upon both man and the ground brought heartache and suffering into the world.

**Sin and death passed to all men from Adam -**

**Romans 5:12 – *Death in Adam, Life in Christ***

**<sup>12</sup> *Adam sinned, and that sin brought death into the world. Now everyone has sinned, and so everyone must die.***

**Because we have inherited this sinful nature, it is impossible for us to be made righteous by our own power.**

**Romans 3:10-12, 23 –**

<sup>10</sup> The Scriptures tell us, ***“No one is acceptable to God!***

<sup>11</sup> Not one of them understands or even searches for God. <sup>12</sup> They have all turned away and are worthless. There isn't one person who does right.

<sup>23</sup> **All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.**

Jesus' coming at Christmas was **God's plan** from the very beginning to make atonement (pay the price) for all of mankind's sin.

Jesus is:

**Revelation 13:8b, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."**

**Galatians 4:4-5** - <sup>4</sup>But when the time was right, God sent his Son, and a woman gave birth to him. His Son obeyed the Law, <sup>5</sup>so he could set us free from the Law, and we could become God's children.

**We deserved to die, but grace was given so that we could live!**

- It is obvious we could never repay the Lord for what he has done.
- The price he paid was **too great**.
- We cannot **earn** our salvation; **we must receive it as a free gift**.
- We must understand that all we are, we are **by the grace of God**.

**It is tempting for us to look at our lives and to think we are pretty good.**

- We might say: "**I don't drink, smoke, cuss, etc.**
- **I see others make bad decisions**, but I choose what is right.
- I ignore the peer pressure and take the high road when the conversation turns vulgar."

**But none of these things mean that I deserve salvation!**

- We must settle it once and for all that **without God's grace we are just as sinful as the next guy!**
- I can discipline myself to pray, I can fast, I can dress a certain way, I can talk a certain way, I can read nothing but the Bible, **NONE of these things will earn me salvation!**
- **It is through grace and grace alone.**

**That is why salvation is called a gift.**

- Awards and rewards are earned-but **gifts are given freely.**
- Peter refers to the "**gift of the Holy Ghost.**"
- Paul talks of the "**free gift.**"
- **God gives that free gift of His spirit to us - the ultimate act of grace!**

**There is a Biblical concept from the OT we don't talk much about.**

- I won't go into a lot of detail, because we understand it's OT usage.
- But what is more important for us is that we understand it's NT significance.
- **The word is circumcision.**
- In the OT it was a sign of God's covenant with Abraham.
- In the NT it represents a "cutting off" of the works of the flesh.

**Paul lists some of these in Galatians 5:19-21 - <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, <sup>21</sup> envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, ***that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*****

**Paul told both the Ephesians and the Colossians that they should "put off" those things, and allow the fruit of the Spirit to manifest itself in their lives.**

The Jews were concerned with the natural act of circumcision, and felt it was the only way to enter into a covenant relationship with God.

**Paul understood that the natural was pointing to the spiritual.**

**Romans 2:28-29 - <sup>28</sup> Just because you live like a Jew and are circumcised doesn't make you a real Jew. <sup>29</sup> To be a real Jew you must obey the Law. True circumcision is something that happens deep in your heart, not something done to your body. And besides, you should want praise from God and not from humans.**

***Works of the flesh can be anything we do outside of the spirit, including "religious" things.***

The Jews were requiring circumcision of Christian converts - a "religious" act, yet not one that was needed for salvation.

**Paul declared; Galatians 6:15 - <sup>15</sup> It doesn't matter if you are circumcised or not. All that matters is that you are a new person.**

In other words, **it is not our works of righteousness that saves us**; the important thing for both Jew and Gentile is **to become a new creature in Christ Jesus!**

That is **only possible through the power of the Spirit** that is *given by the grace of God.*

- Stop trying to be good enough!
- **Allow God's grace to transform your life into** what He wants you to be.
- Does that mean that we quit trying to do what is right? **No!**

**Having settled the question that salvation cannot be earned** - we must now look at the other side of the coin.

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**We must guard against what one man called "*cheap grace.*"**

**Jude** spoke of those who (*Jude 1:4*), "...turn[ed] the grace of our God into lasciviousness. "

**Jude 1:4** – <sup>4</sup>For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into **lewdness** and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

**CEV** - Some godless people have sneaked in among us and are saying, "God treats us much better than we deserve, and so it is all right to be immoral." They even deny that we must obey Jesus Christ as our only Master and Lord. ***But long ago the Scriptures warned that these godless people were doomed.***

Paul admonished us; **Galatians 5:13** - <sup>13</sup> **My friends, you were chosen to be free. So don't use your freedom as an excuse to do anything you want. Use it as an opportunity to serve each other with love.**

**Just because we are saved by grace alone does not mean we can *live any way we choose***

**Paul asked the question; Romans 6:1-2**

What should we say? **Should we keep on sinning, so that God's wonderful kindness will show up even better?**

**He quickly answers – 6:2 No, we should not!** If we are dead to sin, how can we go on sinning?

Now that we understand **the working of grace** on our lives, we can look at its relationship to “works.”

***Our text emphatically declared that we are saved by grace through faith, and that it was not of works lest any should boast.***

***But in the very next verse Paul states;***

**Ephesians 2:8-10 – <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

- ***So which is it?                      Is Paul contradicting himself?***

First he says that **we are saved by grace**, and then he says that **we are ordained to walk in good works!**

Here is what we must understand.

***Good works are not the cause of salvation, But they are definitely the result***

***Our calling...“demands purity of life and nothing less; we have been freed from sin to this end, that we may obey righteousness.”***

**Redemption’s objective is to change us into the image of Christ**

**God prepared and designed his redemptive work so that it would cause us to do good works.**

It is **no accident** that **once a person is saved by the power** of the Spirit, they experiences **a complete change** in **there way of life.**

Jesus taught; **Matthew 5:16 - <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

- Good works **don’t** buy salvation, they glorify God!

Paul wrote; **1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.**



We are to “abound to every good work” II Corinthians 9:8 – <sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

*And to be “fruitful in every good work”* Colossians 1:10 - <sup>10</sup> that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

**CLOSE:**

These “good works” are the crowning result of God’s salvation in our lives.

Romans 6:22 - <sup>22</sup> But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

Many have thought that Paul and James were at odds.

- Paul emphasized salvation by grace through faith, not of works lest any should boast,
- Yet James says that faith without works is dead.
- Paul was guarding against those who were trying to earn salvation,
- And James was writing to those who figured that since they were saved, they could live any way they pleased!

See the difference in emphasis?

- Those who try to merit salvation through good works will never do so,
- But those who rely on the grace of God will find themselves abounding in good works.

The Problem with Santa Claus must never become the Problem of the Saint of God!