



## The Problem with Santa Claus

*Rev Roger Spaugh*

*“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 a boon 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.
- Hmm, 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. 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.”

**Text:**

***Ephesians 2:8-10.** "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."*

- 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.
- As “holiness” Pentecostals we must be careful not to place our emphasis on outward appearance, while at the same time we must not ignore it’s importance, either. This Christian life is a life of balance, and we must have a balanced theology behind a balanced lifestyle. You will no doubt hear many times in your lifetime that your expression of holiness is bondage to a legal code. That is why we must understand what grace is and what grace does.
  - 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 created he him; male and female created he 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, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.")
- 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 "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:
  - There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.")
- 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, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."
- 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, I can keep my hair a certain length-but 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, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall 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, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." 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 need for salvation. Paul declared; Galatians 6:15, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."
- 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. 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. " Paul admonished us; Galatians 5:13, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." 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, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" He quickly answers; Romans 6:2a, "God forbid!" 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 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained 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! John Calvin said; 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, he experiences a complete change in his way of life. Jesus taught; Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Good works don’t buy salvation, they glorify God! Paul wrote; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with 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) and to be “fruitful in every good work” (Colossians 1:10). These “good works” are the crowning result of God’s salvation in our

lives (Kinzie). Romans 6:22, "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto 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!