

Vol. 6. SEPT., 1899. No. 3.

THE GOSPEL BANNER.

Subscription Price, 20c Per Year.



SAVE YOURSELVES



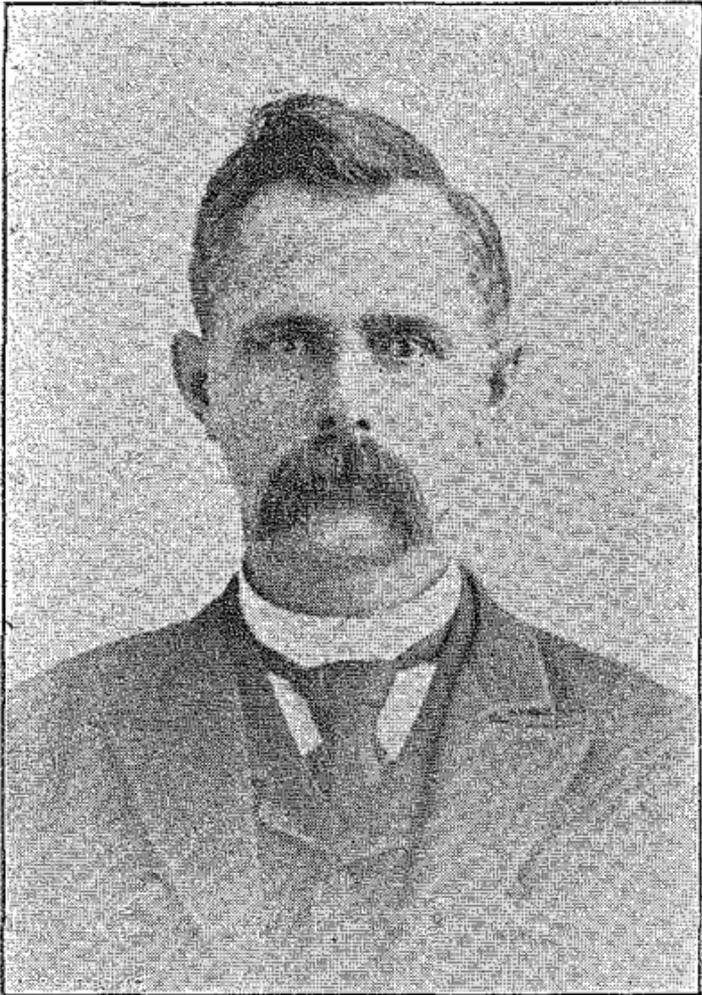
BY ELDER I. M. SMITH.

Issued Quarterly at the Ensign Publishing House, Independence, Missouri.

Entered at the Independence, Mo., Post Office as Second-Class Mail Matter

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ELDER I. M. SMITH.

SAVE YOURSELVES.

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The text chosen as a foundation for the remarks that I may make this evening you will find in the 2d chapter of Acts, and the 40th verse:

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

The thought is, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation," and I hope, by the help of the Spirit, to be enabled to show you how it would be possible for those individuals, addressed here, to save themselves. It is true that we learn from the Scriptures that eternal life is a "gift of God." We learn, too, from the same Scriptures, that man was lost, was dead in trespasses and in sins,

and could not, by any possibility, save himself until there was an atonement made for him; until his redemption was purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ; and, when that was done, and the gospel given unto him, then there was something required of him; that is, he was commanded then to save himself.

I know it is a common idea, or at least it is one that is frequently taught, that there is nothing for man to do, so far as the salvation of his soul is concerned, only to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I think I am justified in saying that we contend as strongly for the faith that was once delivered to the Saints as any people upon the earth, and that we believe, as strongly as any people, the statement "Without faith it is impossible to please God;" but while we believe that faith is absolutely necessary, and that it is impossible to please God without it, we also believe that there are

certain works required on the part of men, which are just as essential, just as necessary to his salvation, as it is that he believe. Now, if you take the position that men are saved by faith alone, then it seems to me that you would have to admit that Satan himself will be saved, because the Apostle James has said: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble." So you see if you have nothing only faith to recommend you to God, you have the same that they have. But we are told, sometimes, that faith and confession are necessary and that they are sufficient, because, "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation," and he that believes and confesses is saved; but it seems to me if we take this position, that we are still no farther along than are the devils, for I turn to Luke 4: 34, 35, and I read that

there was in the synagogue "a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying: * * * I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God;" and in the same chapter, 41st verse, it is said again that "devils also came out of many, crying out and saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God.' So if we do nothing, only believe and confess, the devils have done both, hence we are no farther along than they.

But it is said again, "we believe in God, we confess him before men and we also pray to him" Well, if I have read my Bible aright, the devils pray sometimes, especially when they think they stand in need of some favor from the Almighty. By consulting the 5th chapter of the gospel as recorded by Mark, you will find this statement in the 12th verse: "All the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine that we may enter 'into them.'" So you see

that sometimes the devils pray, and here they pray to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may say, however, that your prayers are answered sometimes. Well, in the next verse he tells us, "And forthwith Jesus gave them leave, and the unclean spirits went out and entered into the swine." They offered up a petition to the Lord, and he granted it unto them and permitted them to go into the swine. The devils believe; they sometimes confess God before men; they sometimes pray, and sometimes their petitions are granted; so you see if we do nothing more than the above, we are not in advance of the devils.

The apostle says in this text, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." How am I to save myself? How is it possible for me to redeem myself? I answer, my friends, that it would be impossible, and that it *was* impossible for man to redeem himself; but after man *has*

been redeemed and the plan of salvation presented to him, then there is something for him to do, hence the Master has said: "Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that DOETH the will of my Father which is in heaven;" and when the Philippian jailor asked of Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?" he was told to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" and then, that he might know what to believe, "they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." When the three thousand, on the day of Pentecost, cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" they were told that there was something that they *must* do. When Saul, of Tarsus, was on his way to Damascus and was struck blind, he cried, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" he too, was told there was something for him to do.

Now, if there was no work for

men to do in order to be saved in the kingdom of God, then when those individuals asked the question, "What shall we do?" they should have been told that there was nothing at all for them to do, only to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is said by some, that we are taught in other places that men are not saved by their work; for instance, we read here in the 3d chapter of Romans and 28th verse, "Therefore, we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." Then in 2d Timothy 1: 9, we read again, "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began;" and in connection with this we are told in Titus 3: 4, 5, "But after that the kindness and love of God, our Savior, toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness

which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." In one of these texts Paul says, "We are justified by faith without the deeds of the law." In another he says, "It is not according to our works;" in another he says, "It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us." Now, I believe just as strongly as you dare to believe, that we are not saved according to our works, and that our works will not, and cannot, in the very nature of things, save us; but while I believe that our works will not save us, yet I believe that there are works required of us that will, in a sense, save us.

If you will turn with me, we will next read Revelation 2:26, where the Lord says to John, "To him that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power

over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." I want to emphasize the thought, "Keepeth my works unto the end." It is not the man who overcomes and keeps his own works unto the end; not the individual who overcomes and does his own will unto the end; but it is the individual who does God's works unto the end, who is to receive power over the nations. In connection with this, I wish to call your attention to that statement of the Apostle Paul found in Ephesians 2:8, where he says: "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." When he says it is not by works, I take that in the same sense as the statement of Paul, when he says, "Not according to our works;"

in the same sense as the statement, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done." It is not by our works that we are saved, because if I could be saved by my own works; works that originated with me; then I could boast. I could say to the Lord, "I am not dependent upon you for salvation, because I can save myself by doing my own works," but when I learn from the Scripture that my works will not save me; that it is the individual who does God's works, the works that he has commanded; then I am forced to admit that I am dependent upon the God of heaven for my salvation. Now, you see, when the apostle says, "It is not of works lest man should boast," he goes right on to say that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath ordained that we should walk in them." I believe that these good works which God hath ordained are the same works re-

ferred to by the Savior to John, upon the isle of Patmos, when he says it is he that keepeth my works unto the end that is to be saved in the kingdom of God, and is to have power over the nations.

It is universally conceded, by all who believe the Bible, that Jesus Christ is our great example; that he is our head; he is our teacher. In Isaiah 55:4 you will find this statement: "I have given him for a witness to the people, for a leader and commander to the people." If he is our leader, if he is our commander, if he is the witness to tell us what to do, or to tell us what the truth is, then it is certainly necessary to our salvation to follow him; and if you will turn to the sixteenth chapter of Matthew you will find the statement made by him, "He that cometh after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." In 1 John 2:6 you will find this statement: "He that saith he

abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked," and Peter makes the statement that "he left us an example, that we should follow his steps." Now, if we are to follow him, walk as he walked, follow his steps, and if he is indeed our leader, then we should try to learn from the Scriptures, the great object of Christ's life, the thought which seems to have been uppermost in his mind; and for light on this point I will call your attention first to John 4:34: "Jesus saith unto them, my meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish HIS WORK." Now, if the Savior had been here to do his *own work* he would have said so, but he says emphatically, that is my "meat," to finish the work of my Father. Turning to the 5th chapter of John, 36th verse, we read again: "But I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do,

bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." What works bear witness of him? The works which his Father hath given him to finish. In connection with this, turn to John 9:4, "I must work the works of him that sent me;" John 17:4 where he said, in praying to the Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." You will discover from all of these scriptures that the Savior himself, when he was here upon the earth, was not doing *his* works, but he was doing *the works of the Father* who sent him; and in John 6:38, he says again, "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him that sent me." He was here for the purpose of pleasing some one else; hence it is that we read when he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, and sweat, as it were, great drops of blood and said: "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass

from me," he adds quickly, "Nevertheless, not *my* will, but *thine* be done." In the 14th chapter of John and 31st verse he says again, "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." Again, in John 15:10, he says, "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." Upon what conditions did the Savior abide in his Father's love? It was by keeping his commandments; the commandments of the Father. Then upon what conditions can you and I abide in the love of our Savior? He says we can do so if we keep his commandments. His commandments then, are evidently what the Lord refers to in Revelation when he says, "keepeth my works." His commandments are evidently what the apostle refers to when he says that we are created in Christ Jesus unto

good works which God hath ordained that we should walk in them. By walking in these good works which God hath ordained, by keeping his commandments, by doing his will, we will be enabled to abide in his love, and receive an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Father; but it is not by doing my works, or your works, not by doing your will nor my will, nor keeping your commandments nor my commandments, that we are to be saved in the kingdom of God, because these are evidently "dead works," and "dead works" are certainly not of a saving nature.

Now, you read in Hebrews 6: 1: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works." It seems from this that there was such a thing as "dead works" in which men were trying to trust, in the days of the

Apostle Paul. In Hebrews 9:14 we read again, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Again, in Hebrews 10:20 he says, "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." You see, there were people who were trusting in being saved by certain "dead works," while the Lord Jesus had taught them "a new and living way;" that they were to forsake these "dead works" of the law of Moses and enter in by this "new and living way" which Christ hath consecrated unto us by his flesh. That these "dead works" referred to here were, in part at least, the works that were done under the law is evident from what we learn in Romans 7:1-7:

“Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth: but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress, but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that be-

ing dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”

So you see that the law had become dead to them, or they had become dead to the law. Works that were done under this law would be likened as “dead works,” and we should repent and turn from them; they will not save us, for we are to enter in by this “new and living way,” serve in “newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” Let me try to illustrate here: suppose that some man comes from a foreign country and desires to become a citizen of this government. He goes before the proper officers, those who were authorized to administer the oath of allegiance, and he makes known his desires and begins then to tell what great deeds he has done in the government from whence he came. He has there been a general, he has led the armies of

his country to battle and to victory; he has been a great statesman, a philanthropist, and has done many mighty and wonderful works for his country; and he thinks because of these good works that he has done in the government from whence he came, that he should be received at once, into this government as a citizen; but he is told that all the works done in the country from whence he came are "dead works," so far as securing him a citizenship in this government is concerned; that if he gets into this government it must be by doing the works that this government shall require; that "we do not accept the deeds done while under the government from whence you came; they will not secure your admission into this government, but you, like every other individual, must come in at the door; you must renounce your allegiance to the government from whence you came; you must take the oath

of allegiance to this government. In other words, you cannot be received as a citizen into this government because of your good deeds done in the past; it must be by doing the works that this government requires; and when you obey the law, enter in at the door, your citizenship will be given to you as a gracious gift, you will not be required to pay for it." It seems to me that this is a fair illustration. We come to our Savior; we begin to tell him what wonderful works we have done; that we have built a college and endowed it, we have built an asylum for the blind, a home for the feeble minded; we have done many good works, and we ask God, because of these good works which we have done, to receive us into his kingdom and give unto us the gift of eternal life, and an inheritance in the kingdom of God; but we are told, it is not by works of righteousness "which we have done," it is not

according to "our works" that we are to be saved and received into the kingdom of God, but it is by doing his works that we are to enter therein; and hence he points us to the door and says, "You obey the laws of adoption, come into my kingdom by the door, as I have commanded, and then I stand ready, willing and anxious to give unto you the gift of eternal life. I will not charge you anything for it; I will not ask you millions of dollars nor even thousands, not even nickles nor pennies, but all you have to do is to do 'my works,' " those "good works which God hath ordained" that man should walk in them. And when we do his works, simple though they may be, then God gives unto us the gift of eternal life, and he says to us, "Those deeds which you have done, which you bring here, and which, because of them, you ask me to give you an inheritance in my kingdom, were done while you were a citizen of another

government, another country, while you were in the kingdom of darkness, while you were in the kingdom of death. Now, if you want the gift of eternal life, you come in by the door, be delivered 'from the powers of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son' and then the 'gift of God is eternal life' unto you; unto every other individual who will accept it upon the conditions prescribed in my law." Upon the condition, then, of doing his work, men will be saved in the kingdom of heaven, but if we undertake to be saved by doing our own works, then let me assure you, my friends, it will be a failure in every sense of the word.

It seems to me that this thought is expressed by the Savior in Mark 7, where he says, beginning at the seventh verse: "Howbeit, in vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment

of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups; and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." There is the trouble, my friends, we reject the commandments of God that we may do our own will, keep our own traditions, instead of the works of God. And evidently these traditions and "dead works" which the people were trusting in for salvation, were the ones to which the apostle refers, when he says, "Not according to our works;" "without the deeds of the law," "not by works of righteousness which we have done." These would not, and could not, save us in the kingdom of God. But we should keep his commandments and, instead of introducing the commandments of men, the doctrines of men, the works of men, and doing them as the religion of Jesus Christ, we should be very

careful at all times that the works are of God and not of man. Hence, we can see the force of the question that the Savior propounded to the Pharisees when he asked them, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men?" Now, they knew, they reasoned among themselves and said, "If we say from heaven, he will say, Why did ye not believe him?" They understood the force of this question, and hence refused to answer him. So when any work is presented to us in connection with the gospel of Christ, the question should be, Is it the work of God or is it the work of men? If it is the work of man, then I am just as willing to admit that it will not save, as you dare to be; but if it is the work of God then I say this, "he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven," he is to enter therein. I say it is "to him that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end," as saith the Lord

Jesus Christ, who is to be saved, and receive power over the nations. The only question for us to decide in regard to any work that may be required of us, is, whether that work is the work of God or not. If it is the work of God, then it is essential and necessary to our salvation and final exaltation in the celestial kingdom of our God. So when we come to examine the Scriptures, we want to keep in mind how it is that men can save themselves.

As already stated, the Lord Jesus Christ had come and died for man. He had passed through the pains of death; had risen from the grave and was now the victor. The Apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, had presented Christ unto the people as a risen Savior, as one who was able, willing and ready to save them, and when they cried out, Men and brethren, what shall we do? he says to them, "Repent." Now, the question is, is that the

work of God, or is it the work of men? "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Let me ask again, when the Apostle Peter says, "Repent and be baptized," etc., was he teaching the doctrine of Christ or the commandments of men? If it was the commandments of men, then it is in vain to expect salvation by obeying what he says; but if it is the doctrine of the Lord, then remember, it is "not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

Now, ask the Apostle Peter what shall we do to be saved? He has told them just what they shall do, repent and be baptized, and then he says, "Now save yourselves from this untoward generation." The Lord Jesus Christ has done his part; he suf-

ferred and died for you; he has risen triumphant from death and the grave for you; he has brought salvation to you and offers it to you upon these conditions; now, it is left with yourselves whether you will be saved, or whether you will be lost. Now, I trust you can see, my friends, how it is that these people were able to save themselves; in other words, how their salvation was placed in their own hands; they could be saved, or they could be condemned, just as they chose; they could obey God and live, or they could reject his commandments and die; and hence, they were in that peculiar position described by the prophet when he says, "Choose you this day whom you will serve." They were left then to decide and act for themselves; the plan of salvation had been laid out for them, God had done his part and he leaves it now for them to do their part. They may go to work of themselves in their own way, but that

would not do. The commandments of man would be in vain; it must be by doing "his work," and the Apostle Peter here was either teaching the doctrine of man, or the doctrine of Jesus Christ, one of the two. If you say he was teaching the doctrines of man, then he was teaching in vain; but the very fact that they had just been endowed with the power of God's Spirit from on high; that they were all filled with the Spirit of God, precludes the idea that they were teaching the doctrines of men, and hence forces me to the conviction that it was the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that when he said, "Repent and be baptized," he was telling them to do the works of God, "which God hath ordained that we should walk in them," and by doing these good works they would be enabled to "save yourselves from this untoward generation."

Now, I might illustrate further here by saying, supposing a man

was away down here in a pit. We will suppose that the walls of this pit are perpendicular and they are slippery. Now, the man goes to work to climb up, but he has no foothold, and no handhold. He makes no progress whatever, although he works from morning till night, and from night till morning; and when he starts in each morning, he is at the bottom of the pit, and at sunset he is still there. His works can never save him. But a friend comes along, constructs a great ladder, and lets it down to him. This ladder is strong enough to bear him up, but there are some peculiar circumstances in the way that the friend cannot go down to him and carry him out; but he constructs a ladder, perhaps at great expense and labor, and, when finished, and let down to the man in the pit, he is told to climb out upon it, round by round, and save himself from this condition in which he is placed. Well,

suppose this individual says, "The ladder is all right, but I want to be saved so as to be independent;" and he still climbs away at the sides of the pit. Now, his works can never save him, but his friend at the top has told him to do a certain work, that is, to climb up this ladder. If he will do the work that his friend has commanded, he can be saved all right, but you see if he trusts in his own works they are in vain.

It seems to me this is just the way with us. We were away down in sin and death; we were dead in sin. We were not able to save ourselves; we were unable to make ourselves alive from this condition; but the Savior, the friend, looked down upon us and took compassion on us. He came down and suffered and died for us and then arose triumphant, went back to his Father and sat down with him on his throne, and let down a great ladder to us, the gospel ladder, and he tells us now to take hold of this ladder and climb up; to commence at the bottom, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; then

take another round, repent of your sins; then another step, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins; then another step, have hands laid upon you for the reception of the Holy Spirit; then after that the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment, and, finally, after that, the place of happiness in the kingdom of God. Now, the individual says to him, "No, Lord, the ladder looks all right, but I want to be independent; I don't want to be beholden to anybody for my salvation; I want to save myself in a manner that I can boast, hence I am going to work out my salvation independent of this gospel ladder." He tries to pull himself up by his own works, but will he be saved in the kingdom of God? I answer, No. Why? Because he is trusting in "dead works;" in works of his own and not in the works of God. But, on the other hand, suppose he says that the ladder is all right and he thinks it is sufficient, but he does not want to work at all, and he sits down and says, "Lord, if you want me, come down after me and carry me to heaven on flowery beds of ease." What would

you think of that individual? I know what you would think. You'd think he was not worth saving, and that he ought not to be saved. And then again; suppose an individual looks at the gospel ladder that our friend from above has let down, and he says, "I believe." Now, what kind of a faith? There is a dead faith in the world, but the Apostle Paul says that in Christ Jesus "neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."—Gal. 5: 6. And the Apostle John says, "This is the love of God that we keep his commandments;" and, if the faith that availeth anything in Christ Jesus is the faith that "works by love," then it works by keeping the commandments of God. Now, if this man in the pit has that kind of faith, the faith that works by keeping the commandments of God, he will lay hold of the gospel ladder; he will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with that faith that works; hence, when he believes, and receives that living faith, he will go to work and take the first step, and then another, and another, and by and by he reaches the top,

is delivered from the powers of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. But whose works has he done? He has done the works of God, the works that God had commanded him to do.

Now, you may say he was saved by faith. And so he was; but he had to do the "works of God" in order to make his faith avail anything in Christ Jesus. His faith saved him because it was a faith that works by keeping the commandments of God. We may say it was the ladder that saved him; that God saved him; that works saved him; and we would be right in every one, because he could not have been saved without the help of God, without the gospel ladder; he could not have been saved without the faith that led him to work, to obedience; and he could not have been saved without the works; so you see that when he says he was saved by faith it is correct. When James says he was justified by his works it was true; when Paul says that "eternal life is a gift from God," it is correct, because man has paid nothing for his salvation. He simply climbs up the ladder as

the Lord has told him, obeys the commandments, and enters into the kingdom; and God then gives unto him eternal life. So you will see that while there is a certain work required of him, yet "eternal life" is not, and cannot be purchased by man—it is a gift. So when we read here in the Scriptures that it is not according to "our works," let us keep in mind that there is a difference between "our works" and the "works of God." That "our works" are the commandments of men; "our works" are the doctrines of men; but the "work of God" which he has commanded us to do, is that which will lead us—if we obey it, and keep faithful unto the end of our days—unto eternal life, and secure to us power over the nations, and we shall live and reign with him. Hence, my friends, when the gospel is presented to you; the way of life and salvation is preached by those having authority, and you are given a chance to accept it, then your salvation is left, to a certain extent, in your own hands, and the Apostle Peter could well say, "Save yourselves from this un-toward generation."

