

GRACE AND FREE-WILL; FAITH AND GOOD WORKS

Christianity of all ages to come, will not forget the wound of division caused by the so called Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. What was the matter in question? The pivot was the misunderstanding of the inseparability of grace and free-will; faith and good works in human redemption and salvation. This is one of the painful results of neglecting the principle of both/and in faith matters which we explained in our previous reflection. It is the consequence of importing one of those inimical concepts (“alone”) which never fits well in theology and faith.

The truth is that we are redeemed by grace and believing this through faith, makes it real. But what grace wrought for us was not imposed on us. We have to accept it freely. And if we accept it, we have to keep it by living up to it; otherwise we lose it. What is remarkable is that in each of the passages where St. Paul said something about grace and faith which God supplies in our salvation, he followed it up with some reference directly or indirectly to human response through good deeds. Ephesians 2:8 goes with Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 2:16 synergies 2:17; Romans 3:20-23 matches 3:31; 2 Timothy 1:9 rhymes 1:13-14; Romans 11:22 clarifies 11:6; Romans 6:1-2 buttresses 5:1-2; Titus 2:14 expounds 2:11; Titus 3:8 elaborates Titus 3:7.

The simple truism that clarifies the misconception to St. Paul’s writing was given in the following statement of St. Augustine after his elaborate work on the communion between grace and freewill; and between faith and good works in salvation. He said: “For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them.” And then he adds: “What merit, then, does a man have before grace, by which he might receive grace, when our every good merit is produced in us only by grace and when God, crowning our merits, crowns nothing else but his own gifts to us?” (Letters 194:5:9 cited in <https://www.catholic.com/tract/reward-and-merit>).

Deacon Matthew Nwafor