

FAITH

In the realm of exercise training, the old adage “No Pain, No Gain” holds true in the sense that the physical results we hope to achieve are directly related to the desire, consistency and effort that we put forth in reaching those goals. If we do nothing, expecting to reap the benefits, disappointment will surely follow. Knowing the correct formula for success and believing in its effectiveness is simply not enough. We must take action!



This concept is evident spiritually as well, for the apostle Paul said, “And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it.” “Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:23, 26-27)

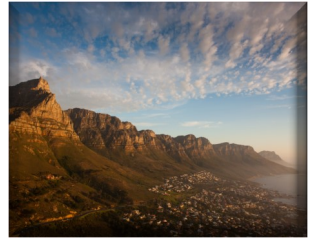
While it is clear that Paul never expected to become a partaker of the reward without action to his aim, it is equally clear that, through his actions, he could never earn it. Paul would never earn what he didn't deserve; and neither will we.

This truth is evident in Ephesians 2:1-10 in a letter written by Paul, and it is here that we find harmony and balance in two seemingly contradictory principles.

Inarguably, it is sin that separates us from God and places us in need of salvation. Paul said to the Ephesians, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” (Ephesians 2:1-2) This condemnation was not exclusive to the Ephesians. We have “all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) We are all guilty. As a result, no man will ever be able to justly stand before God in judgment and proclaim, “I deserve a reward! I have earned it!” Paul confirms that it is impossible for us to save ourselves.

He said that salvation was “...not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) We are simply not worthy of a reward, “For the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23)

It is in this grim predicament of hopelessness that we see the absolute beauty of God. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” (Ephesians 2:4-5) Mercy! Love! Grace!



But if salvation is the “gift of God”, extended only by His grace, why then did Paul go to such great lengths to “buffet his body” so that he might be a partaker of it? He continues his thoughts by saying “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” (Ephesians 2:8) We have been saved by grace through faith; and faith demands action. Paul makes the connection by saying, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should *walk in them*.” (Ephesians 2:10) If we are to fulfill the purpose for which God created us, our faith must be an active one!

James speaks of these same works in perfect harmony with Paul. “But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?” (James 2:20) He also adds “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.” (James 2:24) In reference to Abraham, James says, “You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.” (James 2:22) Clearly, knowledge and belief in God's power to save, by itself, isn't enough, for even “the demons believe and shudder.” (James 2:19)

God has created us with one purpose, but He has given us free will with two choices. We can walk “according to the course of this world” as “sons of disobedience” or we can walk as His obedient children. The key is in the character of the Creator and our humble response to Him. A thankful heart filled with joy will be willing to forfeit our pride and selfish desires and be motivated and moved to serve a God that has graciously, mercifully and lovingly given us something that could never be ours otherwise. It is not our works that save us but our obedience to God's good works that He has purposed for us in response to our belief, faith and trust in Him. Praise and glory be to our God!

Therefore, “let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...” (Hebrews 12:1-2)