

## **We Are Saved by Grace**

When Paul says we are "*saved by grace*" and our salvation is "*not of ourselves*" and is a "*gift of God*," I don't believe he is saying that we do not do anything at all, that we do not in any way "participate" in the salvation process. What He is saying is that we are carried along by the Holy Spirit who gives us the ability to do what we cannot do for ourselves. There is no room for boasting.

The Salvation "process" has two aspects to it. The first aspect has to do with God's forgiveness and complete acceptance of us as His beloved children, and raising us up from the dead and taking us back to our home in heaven when we die. For that to happen, we do absolutely nothing. When we die, all of us, without exception, are enlivened spiritually and given spiritual bodies and returned back to our source, our Heavenly Father in Heaven. This gift cannot be earned in any way.

The quality of our life, before and after death, however, is another matter, and that has to do with another very important aspect of our salvation experience, our being made into the likeness of Christ, or what you might call the "reformation of our character." Some theologians like to call it "sanctification." This is a process that we "work out" in relationship with God the Holy Spirit. This is what I referred to above as the being "carried along by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit of God enables us to overcome the weakness of the flesh and become more like Christ during our earthly walk. The Spirit of God also helps us after death as we continue making even more progress. None of us enters the heavenly realms with fully-reformed characters. This second aspect of our salvation experience, the becoming like Christ, is an ages-long process. It does not culminate until the end of the ages.