



# A Journey to Grace

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Our CoG7 historian reflects on important developments in our doctrine of salvation.  
**by Robert Coulter**

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**T**he Church of Christ (early 1860s) in Michigan was the earliest predecessor to the Church of God (Seventh Day). Her doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ, or soteriology, was stated by Enos Easton, editor of *The Hope of Israel* magazine: "As principles we shall maintain . . . 'That sin entered the world and

death by sin;' . . . That man having sinned, and [the] sentence of death having been passed upon him, he can have no hope of eternal life except through Christ; and that too, by a resurrection from the dead."

The General Conference of the Church of God adopted Articles of Faith in its 1888 meeting, which stated, "We believe that repentance, conversion, baptism by immersion, a godly life through faith in the cleansing power of the *blood* of Jesus, and His *mediatorship* for us, are the *essential* elements of salvation. . . . that man is mortal and has no consciousness in death

. . . there will be a resurrection of the righteous to everlasting life . . . at the second coming of Christ."

In an article he titled "The Law of God," Gilbert Cranmer, founder of the Church of Christ, expressed his belief that salvation is obtained by faith and works:

Under the New Testament as under the Old, God demands that we show our faith by works . . . our hope, our whole hope [of eternal life] is in the resurrection. . . . How shall we show faith? . . . we must be "buried with Christ" and rise again, to walk in newness of life. This is all plain. May we all love the law; O may it be written in our hearts!"

In the October 5, 1915, issue of the *Bible Advocate*, I. N. Kramer, a charter member of the Marion, Iowa Church of Jesus Christ, expressed his opinion on how sinners receive salvation:

In the death of Christ we see Jesus bearing the punishment due our sins, and giving to us the benefit of his loving righteous act. . . . Law and justice demand satisfaction for offences. Grace meets that satisfaction. . . . The grantor taking upon himself the penalty, makes full requisition for it at his own expense and bestows the benefit upon the erring one. Such is free grace, the grace of God through Christ.

In 1917, Andrew N. Dugger, editor of the *Bible Advocate*, unilaterally revised the Church's Articles of Faith of 1888. He called his revision *What the Church of God Believes and Why*. It contained forty statements of doc-

trine, nine of which addressed different aspects of salvation. But the word *grace* never appeared in his statements on salvation, except in the Bible texts he quoted as support for each statement.

Dugger's revised doctrinal statements taught that salvation is received and maintained by works. They were adopted by the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), Stanberry, Missouri, as its official statement of doctrine. The Conference retained it as its doctrinal statement, virtually unchanged, until 1949.

The 1949 revision of the Stanberry Conference's doctrinal statement contained four statements that addressed the Church's soteriology. Statement 7 was titled "The Plan of Salvation," and number 8 was titled "The Blood of Christ," but neither statement mentioned God's grace. Further, Statements 9 and 10 emphasized salvation by obedience to God, without a reference to grace.

Number 9: "*Accepting Christ:* To secure the benefits of the Plan of Salvation, each individual must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him as his personal Savior, obey the terms of the Gospel, and pattern his life after the example of Christ."

Number 10: "*Terms of the Gospel:* The terms of the Gospel include faith in God, and His Son, Jesus Christ, repentance and confession of sin, including restitution where possible; baptism by immersion in water, signifying the burial of the old life of sin and the arising to a new life of obedience to God."

Over the next thirty-plus years, the Church of God placed greater emphasis on works in

her doctrine of salvation than on the grace of God. However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Church's laity and ministry began to understand that salvation is received by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. In recognition of this, the North American Ministerial Council of 1986 took the first step to introduce the concept of grace in the Church's soteriology. The council adopted a Statement of Consensus, which acknowledged God's grace but retained a works ethic:



#### Statement of Consensus

We are saved by God's grace through faith in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ. This grace and salvation demands our obedient response, inspires our obedient response and empowers our obedient response. Therefore, because it is God's grace which lead to holy living and obedience rather than holy living and obedience which leads to God's grace, God's grace should receive the greater emphasis, but *not* without maintaining a proper balance.

However, as the Church's un-

derstanding of God's grace in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ became clearer, the North American Ministerial Council of 2006 adopted a doctrinal statement recognizing that salvation is by God's grace alone. Its statement, titled "Man, Salvation and Life," represents the Church of God's present doctrine of salvation:

Sinful humanity may be saved from the penalty of eternal death and receive eternal life instead, solely by the grace of God through

faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies. Atonement for sins, with its attendant promise of eternal life, comes through Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf and is received in human experience by faith and repentance.

Thank God! His Holy Spirit corrects error and leads believers into truth (John 16:13)! **BA**

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