

Up To You Or Up To God?

Joe Slater

Who determines where you dwell eternally? Is it up to you, or is up to God? The short answer is: “Yes!”

That salvation from sin and the resulting eternal life are a gift cannot be denied successfully! Romans 6:23 couldn’t be clearer: *“For the wages of sin is death, but **the gift of God** is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* We call Jesus “Savior” for a reason – if we could provide for our own deliverance from the guilt and penalty for sin, we wouldn’t need a savior. But obviously we cannot!

Unfortunately, some have erroneously concluded that since we cannot save ourselves by ourselves, we must be totally passive. They believe God unconditionally picked and chose certain individuals to be saved and exercised irresistible grace toward them regardless of any faith or obedience.

Others have bought into the equally mistaken idea that by working really hard we can “almost” save ourselves, and God’s grace just gives us a little nudge over the finish line. Such a notion ignores the fact that good works can’t wash sins away – only Jesus’ blood does that. The bird lady in “Home Lone – Lost In New York” was wrong: a good deed doesn’t erase a bad deed. Not even at Christmas!

The fact is, a gift is given on the terms of the giver. Complying with God’s terms to receive the gift of eternal life isn’t meriting or earning salvation! In no way does it deny the grace of God. And we have the free will to decide whether to comply with God’s terms or to refuse them. God elected (chose) Jesus to be our Savior, and He elected (chose) to save those who trust and obey Jesus.

So, is it up to God or up to you? Yes!

The Power Of Surrender

Surrender hardly seems powerful. The concept is counter-intuitive. Surely, we have to be in charge—in control and on top of things! This is power. But, is it really? And, how enduring is such power? We can all think of those who once were on top of things only to have things crumble and fall apart because of unforeseen circumstances or moral weaknesses. Many have worn Proverb 16:18 as their epitaph. *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.”* One does not have to be among the politically elite or the rich and famous to wear this label. It is as common as our failure to surrender—our failure to acknowledge the Creator and yield to His will. Someone has said, “You are only as strong as your willingness to surrender.”

From a biblical perspective, power is given to those who surrender. This is a common theme in so many of our favorite Bible stories, from the crossing of the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses to David’s victory over Goliath. Ultimately, faith is trusting God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. When Paul could hardly see past his infirmity of the flesh, he prayed to the Lord three times and heard the Lord answer him, saying, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). His conclusion regarding all sorts of difficulties he suffered for Christ’s sake was this: *“when I am weak, then I am strong”* (v. 10). Peter strikes upon a similar conclusion, saying, *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you”* (1 Peter 5:6-7).

In the final analysis, we are but flesh. We must come to know that *“the Lord Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves...”* (Psalm 100:3). Any power we possess comes from the acknowledgement of this fact and our corresponding surrender to Him. *“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might”* (Ephesians 6:10).

--Glen Elliot (Greenbriar, AR)

Unopened Love Letters

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways,” is perhaps one of the best-known lines of poetry ever written. But do you know the story of the creator of those words?

Elizabeth Barrett was a poet who lived many years with her parents. Her father was bizarre. He had forbidden all twelve of his sons and daughters to wed.

Elizabeth met another poet by the name of Robert Browning. They corresponded and met in secret. When Robert approached Edward about marrying Elizabeth, he was denied and ordered out of the house — never to return.

Robert’s love was strong, so the couple eloped. Edward Barrett disowned his daughter. Elizabeth loved her parents and did everything she could to be reconciled with them. She wrote beautiful, expressive, endearing letters to them. She did this for ten years without response.

Finally, a package came from the Barretts. It was a happy moment for Elizabeth as she opened it. Had her dad finally forgiven her? —No! Instead, in the box, she found all of her letters returned and unopened. Elizabeth was broken-hearted!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a world-famous poet and her letters of reconciliation have been called “masterpieces of literature.” But her parents never read them!

Likewise, Jesus has sent to mankind beautiful letters of reconciliation. He even died so that sinful people could have hope of everlasting life. It must break His heart that so many refuse to even read these letters of love!

Do you read your Bible? Or do you leave God’s love letters, unopened?

“Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart” (Psalm 119:2).

--Larry Fitzgerald (Abilene, TX)