

(1) One is **despair**, believing that grace cannot really save me, this wretched creature that is me. Yes, there are those that believe they have fallen so far, that they cannot be saved even by God's grace. This is an inverted kind of pride, a holding on to yourself in a desperate way, by thinking: "At least in my fallenness I am unique, I am so far gone down the road to damnation that not even God can get me back!" Such people need to be reminded of the wonderful good news that their salvation is "none of their business", it is accomplished by God, completed once and for all on the cross.

(2) The other way of "shrinking back" from trust is the one described above as a prominent expression of "Christian" faith today: believing that I have to do something to earn the salvation that "is available" as some preachers put it. Surely I have to at least accept it, believe it, say yes to it, be active in some way, so that I still have a handle on it. This way of "shrinking back" is the last ditch attempt to remain in charge, to hang on to deciding for ourselves between "good and evil", the ability, which was promised by the serpent and would allegedly make us "like God".

In each one of us the old Adam wants to be "like God", and is frustrated when he or she hears that God is in charge. Our insistence that our salvation depends on our acceptance of it reveals the old Adam in us: we still want to be in charge. But this is not really trust, is it? Trust, or "faith" as it has been traditionally translated (which has obscured the true meaning of the word), is really to let go of all control and to let God save us completely. This is what gives us the **confidence** to approach the throne of God's grace, approach it again and again, knowing that we could never earn the permission to do so, it has been granted to us freely. In this we need lots of **endurance**, because the whole world is trying to convince us of the contrary, and much of Christian teaching today revolves around conditions of acceptance, around terms of merit and success - you don't count, if you don't perform.

But with God it's different - theologians have coined a descriptive phrase to express it: God's word is "performative". God's Word performs what it says. It was so right at the beginning, when God created the cosmos by speaking it into existence. And God's Word is "performative" when this "Word of God" becomes flesh and dwells among us; this "Word of God" was called "Jesus", which means "Saviour", and that is what He does, He saves. Let Him do it! God's Word never returns to Him without having achieved what it set out to do. So don't get in the way by trying to *perform* all the things that Christians over the centuries have falsely considered to be necessary additions to grace. Just let go, and let God do it! "For we are not those who shrink back and are lost (in our "do-it-yourself" salvation plans), but those who trust and are saved by grace alone!" (Verse 39). Oh, this truly is a strong consolation! May it comfort you as it comforts me.

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