

THE PROBLEM OF GRACE

Latter-day Saints have been wary of historical doctrines of salvation by grace alone in conventional thought—and for good reason. While the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ is the profound doctrine of divine love, it has been distorted nearly beyond recognition. The problem starts when the doctrine is removed from its original interpersonal and covenant context and placed in a moral context of the operation of the will and the causes that act upon it. Such a context eviscerates its central meaning. The problems that arise from this transposition are numerous. Initially, I will focus on just three of them: (1) the problem of imputed righteousness, (2) the problem of infused righteousness, and (3) the problem of predestination.

As with many other doctrines central to conventional Christianity, it was Augustine, more than anyone else, who defined the discussion. Unfortunately, by placing the debate about works and grace in the context of the will and its power to choose what is right, Augustine transformed the relational character of the doctrine. Because Augustine viewed pre-regenerate mortals as utterly incapable of choosing or doing anything good before God as a consequence of his doctrine of original sin, only an irresistible grace could overcome the obstinacy of an evil will. Even the faith that results in justification is a gift from God and cannot be a human act. Thus, God and God alone is responsible for who is saved and who is damned.