

# What Must I Do to Be Saved?

**Summary:** *The Bible clearly testifies to the role of faith as uniquely offering the means to salvation. We believe and we are saved. In some sense, it is just that simple. However, we must consistently and conscientiously examine ourselves as to the efficacy and reality of our faith. The one who loves God and is called by Him should always seek to be growing in grace, knowledge and passion for his Maker and Master.*

*and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

**Acts 16:30-31**

Since her inception, the church has consistently proclaimed that salvation is granted to God's children by His grace through faith. This was the message of Jesus,<sup>1</sup> the apostles and the early church. As Ephesians 2:8-9 says "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." This understanding of *solo fide* ("faith alone") is the basis of Biblical Christianity and lies at the heart of a proper understanding of God's dealings with His people.

## Texts Emphasizing the Role of Faith as the Instrument Through Which We are Saved

- *but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

**John 20:31**

- *And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.*

**Acts 15:8-9**

- *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*

**Romans 1:16-17**

- **Romans 3:21-31** (28 – by faith apart from the works of the law)

- o nowhere are we said to be justified by works apart from faith

- *Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness*

**Romans 4:4-5**

- *For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith*

**Romans 4:13**

- *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.*

**Romans 5:1-2**

- *nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified*

**Galatians 2:16**

- *Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith."*

**Galatians 3:11**

- *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*

**Galatians 3:26**

- *and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith*

**Philippians 3:9**

- *and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

**2 Timothy 3:15**

<sup>1</sup> See especially John 3:15, 5:24, 11:25-26 as John specifically emphasized this element.

- *believing that Jesus is the Son of God* • 1 John 5:13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

### **1 John 5:4-5**

The evidence for faith alone as the instrument through which God works salvation into His people is overwhelming within the pages of Scripture. All that is necessary for salvation is that we believe in the gospel -- the good news of Christ's perfect life and obedience, death for our sins and in our place, and resurrection.<sup>2</sup>

While intending to take nothing away from the above foundation, it is imperative that we address a common and dangerous misunderstanding of the doctrine of solo fide which has consistently plagued the church. This error would seek to minimize the nature of faith to that of mere cognitive assent and/or to denigrate the need for and role of works. This is frequently referred to by its opponents as "cheap grace" in that it neglects the call for repentance and good works.

We are not now embarking upon some fresh heretical understanding of faith alone. The apostle Paul himself dealt with just these very issues and addressed them regularly in his writings. This is particularly the thrust of his argument in Romans 6 in which he writes of the believer's death to sin and life to obedience. The preaching of grace alone and faith alone, although foundational to proper Biblical revelation, always has a tendency to be perverted into a license for sin by the ignorant, corrupt or immature. We must continue to stress the former while constantly opposing the latter.

For those who say that faith is nothing more than mental assent or cognitive recognition, the second chapter of James presents some unanswerable difficulties. Especially important are James 2:17, 2:20, and 2:24.<sup>3</sup> For the person who interprets the "faith alone" understandings above as easy belief or allowing for license to sin, James introduces a fundamental obstacle to such an interpretation.

So, what are we to do with the evidence for faith alone and the clear testimony of James? Are we to say that James was not inspired and seek to have his letter removed from the canon as hoped some Reformation scholars? Are we to confess that

<sup>2</sup> See "What is the Gospel?" and "Is Christ the Only Way?"

<sup>3</sup> James 2:17 *Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, [being] by itself... But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?... You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:21-23 *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven [will enter.] Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'*

Scripture contradicts Scripture such that it is not sufficiently clear on the matter? Neither is a viable option. Rather, the proper understanding of James' epistle is that his intent was not to add to the criteria for salvation, but instead to qualify what true and saving faith really entails. He is neither nullifying nor limiting the role of faith, but rather is expanding our understanding of the true definition of faith. If one has faith which does not work, it is not really faith. It is a misnomer.

It is therefore still exquisitely true that "all that is necessary for salvation is that we believe in the good news," but now we know that such belief carries with it by its very nature an inward transformation which produces and manifests repentance and good works. We are not saved by works, but rather by faith; but the faith which saves is not without works.

## **Pertinent Passages on Repentance and Obedience as Being Related to Faith**

### **Obedience to the Faith:**

- *The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.*

#### **Acts 6:7**

- *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake*

#### **Romans 1:5**

- *obedience of faith*

#### **Romans 16:26**

### **Repentance and Faith:**

- *solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*

#### **Acts 20:21**

- *to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.*

#### **Acts 26:18**

In light of the fact that faith entails more than mere understanding and acknowledgement, it is necessary for each and every Christian to take stock of his or her faith against the criteria which Scripture provides. None of us want to see the reality of Matthew 7:21-23 applied to our own lives.<sup>4</sup> The Scripture is full of related warnings for those who are so deceived.

## Warnings

- *Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you faith the test.*

**2 Corinthians 13:5**

- *if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.*

**Colossians 1:23**

- *keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.*

**1 Timothy 1:19**

- *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.*

**1 Timothy 4:1**

- *which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith.*

**1 Timothy 6:21**

The Lord is not implying, much less stating, that those who profess true faith can decisively fall away from salvation.<sup>5</sup> Rather, He is once again warning us, as in James that those who profess faith and yet work out continuous and unrepentant sin are evidencing that their “faith” is not really faith at all.

The good news for the believer is that just as we are saved by faith, so also are we kept into grace through faith. All that is necessary for salvation is belief and true belief keeps us in God’s promises.<sup>6</sup>

## Continuing by Faith

- *This is the only thing I wasn't to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?*

**Galatians 3:2-4**

- *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*

**Philippians 2:12-13**

Therefore, having been chosen by God for His glory and our joy and having been blessed with faith in His great and sure promises, let us continue to pursue our Lord in confidence that He will complete what He has begun.<sup>7</sup>

## Confidence

- *let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*

**Hebrews 10:22**

In the end, the believer rests in a happy tension of rest and contention. We rest in the promises of God, knowing that it is by faith alone that we enter into those promises. At the same time, we struggle against the flesh and the darkness of the world and fight earnestly for the faith to which we are called.

## Contention

- **Hebrews 6:9-12**

- **Hebrews 10:35-39**

- **2 Peter 1:5-11**

- *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.*

**Jude 1:3**

- *But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.*

**Jude 1:20-21**

## Conclusion

The Bible clearly testifies to the role of faith as uniquely offering the means to salvation. We believe and are saved. In some sense, it is just that simple.

<sup>5</sup> See “Can a Christian Lose His or Her Salvation?”

<sup>6</sup> Study Hebrews 4 for helpful teaching on the interplay between faith and obedience leading into God’s promised rest.

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 1:6 {For I am} confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

However, we must consistently and conscientiously examine ourselves as to the efficacy and reality of our faith. The one who loves God and is called by Him should always seek to be growing in grace, knowledge and passion for his Maker and Master. If, in testing ourselves, we find our hearts dulled and distant, we repent<sup>5</sup> and continue to trust in the gospel which is able and effective to save.

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<sup>5</sup> See "Can a Believer Repent?"