

WHAT GOD HAS (AND HAS NOT) JOINED TOGETHER (3)

Faith and Works

This year we are going to be examining some doctrines (teachings) that God has joined together, even though many seek to separate them. In our previous lessons we have noted the statement that is the foundation of this series (Matthew 19:6) and last week the teaching related to that statement (Marriage, divorce and remarriage – Matthew 19:1-12).

Today we begin to expand on the phrase. Our point is that when God joins two doctrines together, we must respect that in our teachings. Today we want to examine a fundamental “couple” – Faith and works. We have addressed this subject from time to time because of its prevalence in the religious world, especially among denominational friends. Just last month I presented a lesson from James 2:14-26 that addresses this subject based on that specific passage. There are many who advocate that we are saved by “faith alone” (Latin - *sola fide*) and that if we add anything to faith we are rejecting God’s word. But scripture teaches CLEARLY that saving faith is a working faith. So let us see how God has joined together *faith and works leading to salvation*. (NOTE: This lesson will give us a clear idea of my approach for this year).

I. Defining the terms

- a. NOTE: Most in the denominational world believe that obedience is important. And that is their explanation of James 2:24 which is the only time “faith only” is mentioned in regard to salvation. The argument is made that this is not works that save us but works that manifest that we have faith. They see this as different from the faith of Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 4:1-5. They contend that the *justification* of Romans 4 is God justifying us with salvation (through the blood of Jesus) but the *justification* of James 2 is only verifying that we have faith – i.e., it is a PRODUCT of our faith. And while I see the point being made, the text of James is ALSO related to our salvation. Consider vss. 14 where James says, *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*; 2:17, *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*, and, of course, 2:24, *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*.
- b. Faith only is very prevalent.
 - i. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church” (1956 edition, pg. 29, ¶ 68 notes, *Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine and full of comfort.*”
 - ii. The Hiscox Standard Manual for Baptist Churches, on pg. 20-21 notes, *Baptism is not essential to salvation... but it is essential to obedience, since Christ has commanded it.*
 - iii. A prominent website answering the question, Why is faith alone in Christ alone the only way to be saved? ¹begins, *Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone because all of our righteous deeds are tainted by sin (Isaiah 64:6) and are not good enough for us to merit salvation. Therefore, because there is nothing we can do to obtain it, there’s only one thing left for us to do, trust in what God has done in the person and work of Jesus.*
 - iv. The implication is that if we do ANYTHING it is not by faith in Jesus. There is more to the discussion but that is the doctrine we are discussing. Hence, Faith and works are NOT joined together by God is implied.

¹ Slick, Matt. <https://carm.org/why-is-faith-alone-in-christ-alone-the-only-way-to-be-saved>. CARM, 12/15/2024.

- c. Faith (belief) – means *firm belief and trust in God*. But the term is used in more than one way.
 - i. It can mean the simple act of believing – Mark 16:15, 9:24, Matt. 14:31 – O you of little faith; John 8:24 – unless you believe..., John 2:22, ...and they *believed* the scripture and the word which Jesus had said; etc.
 - ii. Faith or believe can be an inclusive term of EVERYTHING we do – Acts 16:31, John 3:36, Hebrews 10:39, *But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul*.
 - iii. Faith can mean the gospel itself – Acts 6:7, Romans 1:5, etc.
- d. Works – can also have different meanings. There are meritorious works (earned – Ephesians 2:8) and works OF faith – John 6:28-29, 1 Thessalonians 1:3 speaks of “your work of faith”, etc.
- e. It is my conviction that there is a difference between obedient works (action) and meritorious works (whereby you earn your salvation), and that our salvation involves MORE than merely believing. And I intend to show you why in this lesson.

II. Faith and works concerning salvation

- a. That we are saved by faith is clearly taught – John 3:16, Romans 1:16, Ephesians 2:8, Acts 16:31, etc.
 - i. But NO passage says that we are saved by “faith only” or “faith alone”.
 - ii. Yet some will appeal to verses we have mentioned and say, “They do not mention baptism, so it is not necessary.” However, there are passages that do NOT mention belief such as Acts 2:38 (cf. Luke 24:46-47 – repentance and remission of sins),
- b. BUT, other passages show faith that does NOT save.
 - i. John 12:42-43 – many rulers believed but for fear did not confess Him
 - ii. James 2:19-20 notes that even demons believe in Jesus AS the Son of God but they certainly are not saved.
 - iii. James 2:14 – Again, faith without works is dead!
 - iv. Therefore, saving faith is a certain type of faith.
- c. Faith is described in terms of action
 - i. John 6:28-29 – this is the work of God that you believe... NOTE – believing itself is described as a work.
 - ii. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 – your “work of faith”
 - iii. Hebrews 11 – “by faith” accompanied by action
 - iv. James 2:18 – show me your faith without your works...
 - v. John 3:36 – *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*
 - vi. Acts 16:30-34 illustrates this – when Paul and Silas spoke to the jailer. NOTE what happened after Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved...”
 - vii. A faith that does not act is dead. The premise of “faith only” implies that you do nothing.
- d. MOST advocates of “faith only” will call for you to do more than believe. E.g., Romans 10:9-10 – they will say you must confess Him. Is confessing Him an act. Many will encourage you to “call on the name of the Lord” by saying the “sinner’s prayer” (which is also not in scripture). Most will tell you that you need to renounce the world and its ways (repentance). If one teaches “faith only” and then asks for ANY of these, they have added something to saving faith.
- e. Continually we are called upon to take action to be saved.
 - i. Matthew 7:21-23 – Jesus Himself taught it is not enough to believe in Him but we must DO His will.
 - ii. John 8:31-32 – if you abide in My word... the truth will make you free.

- iii. Philippians 2:12 – work out your own salvation – NOTE: While this primarily is about maintaining our saved state (i.e., being faithful), it still calls for us to act to be (and stay) saved.
- iv. Acts 2:40 – be saved. Peter after telling them what they needed to do to be saved (2:38) encouraged them to “be saved from this perverse generation.” Both the KJV and ESV say, “Save yourselves...” That is the point of the text.
- v. Acts 10:34-35 to Cornelius – in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him
- vi. James 2: 24 – explained
- f. There are many things that are involved in our salvation
 - i. God’s grace and mercy are the prime factor – Titus 2:11, Ephesians 2:4-9. Without the grace of God there is no salvation. NOTHING else matters without His grace!
 - ii. The blood of Jesus saves us – Revelation 1:5, Matthew 26:27-28 – His blood was shed for the remission of sins. Ephesians 1:7 – redemption in His blood, etc. Understand that without the shed blood of Jesus we are lost. In a sense it is the ONLY thing that can save us. BUT, we have to come in contact with that blood.
 - iii. The gospel saves us – Romans 1:16-17 – it is instrumental in our salvation. 1 Peter 1:23 notes that we are born again through the incorruptible word of God. James 1:21 – the implanted word is able to save your souls. Without the gospel we CANNOT be saved!
 - iv. Obedience saves us – Hebrews 5:8-9 – He is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. 1 Peter 1:20-22 we purify our souls by obeying the truth
 - v. Repentance – Acts 2:38, 17:30-31, Luke 13:3 & 5, etc.
 - vi. Confessing Him as Christ – which sets one’s faith apart from that of the unbeliever – Romans 10:9-10.
 - vii. Baptism – Acts 22:16, 2:38, Mark 16:16, 1 Peter 3:20-21, Galatians 3:26-27, etc.
 - viii. Faithfulness – Matthew 10:22 – he who endures to the end will be saved. Revelation 2:10 – be faithful until death
 - ix. Concerning this list – SOME of these qualities are the product of God, BUT others are calls for man to act. And the promise of salvation is attached to our willingness to do these things.
 - x. Question: WHICH one of these actions is not necessary? And WHY? Before you answer, consider what you are saying about the commands of God! Can we pick and choose which commandments to obey? Consider Revelation 22:18-19. James 2:10 – to stumble in one point is to be guilty. Is the answer to isolate a specific passage and ignore the others, or must we reconcile all that God’s word says on a given subject (2 Timothy 3:16-17, cf. Acts 17:11)? The rational answer is that we must do ALL that God tells us to do. And if not, how can you condemn someone who chooses a DIFFERENT passage as the way to be saved – e.g.

There is so much more that can be said about what saving faith looks like. It is clear in scripture that faith and works are joined together. NOT some action that earns our salvation (then we could boast), but belief that surrenders and obeys God BELIEVING that He will do His part when we do ours. And when you have done everything you possibly can you STILL have NOT earned your salvation (cf. Luke 17:10). With this in mind, WHAT type of faith do you have? Think about it!