

Putting Faith to Work

Is one saved by faith alone, or by faith and obedience? The Bible, God's word, speaks of people who are saved by faith, but it also mentions others who have faith, and yet are not saved. What, then, is required in order for a person to **"have faith and preserve their souls"** (Hebrews 10:39 [ESV])?

Many believe and teach that faith is supernaturally produced, independent of man. Not only is this false doctrine, but it convinces man that he has no part in the acquisition of faith. Hence, those so influenced do not acquire a faith that saves. The Apostle Paul tells us how we obtain faith. Shouldn't we listen to what he says since he was a chosen apostle for the Lord, and a man who was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God? Paul tells us in Romans 10:17 [ESV], **"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."** This is one reason the word is called the **"seed of the Kingdom"** (Luke 8:11, Matthew 13:19). Reading of Jesus' teaching and miracles produces faith in a good and honest heart. That is what John, the beloved disciple, says at the close of the *Gospel of John*: **³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.** (John 20:30-31 [ESV])

Someone who makes a thorough study of God's plan of salvation from sin will be convinced that salvation comes through faith. Paul made this plain by saying, **⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9 [ESV]) But what is saving faith? Is man passive in the process, the gospel plan of salvation, as some affirm? Does simply mentally believing in Jesus Christ, and doing nothing else, bring salvation?

For an answer to the foregoing vital questions let us read John 1:12-13 [ESV]: **¹²But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.** According to these verses, believing on Christ makes it possible for a person to become a son of God. Such faith alone does not save a person; rather, it places salvation within one's reach. Clearly, if one does not believe on the name of Jesus Christ or in the plan of salvation He has provided, he will not take the steps necessary to be saved through God's grace. In other words, it is faith that makes salvation possible.

Saving faith requires 3 things. The first of these is that of **conviction**. The Hebrews writer tells us in Hebrews 11:6, **"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."** So one must be convinced in one's heart that God exists. Yet, this conviction alone is not enough to save, as is well demonstrated in the following passage found in James 2:14-26 [ESV].

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the Demons believe – and shudder! ²⁰Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” – and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

As we just read from verse 19, James says that Demons believe there is one God, but they are not saved. So, something more must be required in order for one to have saving faith.

Faith also requires **trust** in God. One must depend on God as the source of salvation. Daniel was saved from the lions because he believed in God (Daniel 6:23). He did not just accept in his heart that God exists. He trusted God to deliver him from the lions.

Yet, one does not really trust God unless one has the last element of faith, and that is **obedience**. Now, many people will tell you that you are saved by faith without obedience. But the truth is that faith that does not obey is faith that does not save. James 2:14-26 shows that faith without obedience cannot justify, because it is dead and barren. Hebrews chapter 11 is the role call of Old Testament people of faith. But when you study their lives, you will see that every last one of these individuals was rewarded by God only after his faith led him to obey God – never before that!

I read a story about a man from several years ago who was about to push a wheelbarrow across a tightrope over Niagara Falls. Jean-François Gravelet was his given name, but he went by the name of the “Great Blondin.” He earned his title by performing amazing feats of tightrope walking across Niagara Falls while demonstrating his own unique brand of showmanship. You were sure to get your

money's worth when you saw him perform. And he really knew how to stir up the crowd. He would begin his stunts by talking to the audience and working them into a frenzy.

The "Great Blondin" astonished people by carrying a small table, chair and stove to the halfway point of the wire stretched across the raging river, where he would cook a meal and eat it. He also demonstrated his ability to push a wheelbarrow across the wire while blindfolded and then offered to push a volunteer across in the wheelbarrow.

Upon making this offer a person in the crowd was overheard asking another if he believed Blondin could make it across the wire blindfolded with someone in the wheelbarrow. Without realizing that Blondin was listening to their conversation the man said, "Sure, there's no doubt in my mind." "In that case," shouted Blondin, "come get in the wheelbarrow." The startled man quickly shook his head, indicating no, and in embarrassment he ran from the crowd.

Clearly, this man thought he had "faith" or "belief" in the "Great Blondin's" ability, so much so, that he tried to convince his friend. However, when pressed, he really did not believe in Blondin at all.

What is the point of this story? Well, how many of us shout and sing that we love the Lord and that we believe in Him and will do anything He asks, yet when He says, "Follow Me," we don't move? When He says, "Obey," we continue doing whatever we want. And when He says, "Let Me show you the way," we act as though we do not even hear Him. If Christ is your Lord, let Him carry you. Trust Him to lead the way. Give your life completely over to Him and let Him guide you and direct your steps. He will not let you down!

No, you do not need to cross Niagara Falls in a wheelbarrow to please God, but you do need the kind of faith that leads you to act in obedience to His revealed teachings in order for you to be saved through His Son, Jesus Christ.

What this man had was knowledge of Blondin and even agreement that Blondin could do what he said, but he was not willing to trust Blondin. Therefore, he did not have real faith or belief in Blondin because true faith in anything always requires:

- (1) **Knowledge** because we cannot believe what we do not know.
- (2) **Mental agreement** that the facts are true.
- (3) **Trust** or **reliance** on that knowledge and agreement.

Likewise, saving faith in Jesus Christ also requires these three elements to be genuine. It is not enough to know about Jesus, nor is it sufficient to agree that

He is the Savior. One must rely on Him to do what He said, to have saving faith. Jesus said in John 11:25-26 [ESV], ²⁵***I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live,*** ²⁶***and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.***

This brings us to another point: Saving faith also requires an object of faith that is capable of performing the desired result.

“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” (Hebrews 11:7 [ESV]) The Hebrews writer explains to us that Noah believed, first of all, that a destructive flood was coming, though he had never witnessed such a thing before. He further believed that if he did as God had commanded him to do, he and his family would be delivered. Noah’s faith, then, led him to meet God’s conditions, and he, his wife, his three sons and their wives, all were saved from the deluge.

In like manner, faith saves the sinner. Of course, one must first accept what Christ did for him at Calvary, for upon this atoning sacrifice the whole plan of salvation is based. But the sinner’s faith in what Christ did – one’s belief in the promise of salvation if and when one meets the terms of the gospel plan of salvation – it is this belief that leads one to obedience, and this obedient faith brings salvation.

Those who affirm that salvation comes through mental faith alone, that the sinner need do nothing but accept Christ and what He did on Calvary, are prone to quote Paul’s words to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31 [ESV]: ***“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”*** The implication is that all the jailer did to be saved was to believe on Jesus Christ. But proponents of this theory fail to quote verse 32, which reads, ***“And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.”*** This ***“word”*** certainly included the doctrine of water baptism, for verse 33 declares, ***“And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.”*** Since repentance is to precede water baptism, there is no doubt that they also repented, which is what Jesus said we need to do or we will likewise perish. And since we have already been told that Paul and Silas ***“spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house,”*** we know repentance and baptism were both taught. It was not until the jailer had done all of this that we are told the following in verse 34: ***“Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”*** It was after he had been baptized, after he had followed the gospel plan of salvation, after he had come to the Lord in obedient, saving faith that the entire experience caused him to rejoice. How then, did this jailer’s faith bring him

salvation? It did so by leading him to meet the conditions of the gospel. Faith and obedience worked together, and he was saved.

Confession also must accompany faith. In his *Epistle to the Romans*, Paul writes, ⁸***But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);*** ⁹***because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*** ¹⁰***For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*** (Romans 10:8-10 [ESV]) According to this passage, there is a definite connection between confession and salvation. And confession is an act, over and above simple faith in the mind.

Prayer, too, must accompany faith. Continuing his teaching concerning salvation, Paul said, ***“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*** (Romans 10:13 [ESV]) Of course, a person can call upon the Lord from his heart, without physical effort. But the phrase ***“calls on”*** usually implies the use of the voice, or vocal prayer, and is closely associated with ***“confess with your mouth.”*** And any use of the voice in prayer is an act, in addition to faith.

Ours is not a private faith. It is not to be hid under a bushel (Matthew 5:15), for we are a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14). The world needs to see and hear our faith in action.

To go further, we are taught in God's word that a person receives the Holy Spirit by faith. The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 3:2 and 14 [ESV], ²***Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?*** ¹⁴***so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*** What Paul tells the Galatians is in complete harmony with what we read earlier that he told the church in Rome. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ. But does this gift of the Holy Spirit come through faith without any action? Some affirm that it does, giving as their reason that it is not proper to ask anyone for a gift already promised. But they would be wrong, for we are told exactly at what point we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that is at baptism. On the Day of Pentecost Peter told the crowd gathered there listening to the first gospel sermon, ***“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*** (Acts 2:38 [ESV]) It takes our response in obedient, saving faith to submit to baptism that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is at that point that we put on Christ and are clothed in His holy garments (Galatians 3:27)

Christ's own words disprove the idea that the Holy Spirit is a gift bestowed upon us against our will. It is something which we need to ask for. As Jesus says in Luke 11:13 [ESV], ***“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to***

your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” What part, then, does faith play in receiving salvation? A person must believe in Christ's sacrifice and in the availability of the gift of salvation. His faith must motivate him to obey the Scriptural command to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). He must believe that if he will repent and ask in prayer then he will receive the Spirit when he submits to the Lord's blessed commands. His faith leads to obedience and thence to receiving the Spirit and the fullness of salvation.

There is no contradiction between Ephesians 2:8 [ESV], which says, ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith,”*** and James 2:24, which declares, ***“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*** The latter statement is certainly true when “works” means acts of obedience to the terms of the gospel. Only those who have “the obedience of faith” – those who obey the doctrine, obey the gospel, obey Christ – will be saved. Let us examine a few more passages of Scripture that bear this out.

¹⁷But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18 [ESV])

¹⁴How then will they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of Whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” (Romans 10:14-16 [ESV])

²⁵Now to Him Who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – ²⁷to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Romans 16:25-27 [ESV])

⁸Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. ⁹And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰being designated by God a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:8-10 [ESV])

Saving faith leads a person to obey the gospel, and such obedient faith brings salvation in Christ.