

531 What Kind of Faith Saves?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Faith is important in every Christian's life. The Hebrew writer said, "without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." There is faith...and there is *faith*. We want to explore today the kind of faith that God desires from his people. Is it enough just to admit that there is a God in heaven? Or, does God require far more of us when he asks us to believe in Him? Some people say we are saved by "faith only." We ask, what does the Bible say?

That we are saved by faith is surely true. Paul said, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Jesus said in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Again Jesus said in John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Many people take these and other passages to mean that we are saved by faith and faith alone.

But, is that what Jesus and Paul really meant when they spoke these words? Were they saying to us just admitting that there is a God in heaven and Jesus is His Son is all that was meant by the word "faith"? That faith is necessary is surely true, but stating a "truth" is not the same as telling us the "whole truth." The whole truth usually has a great deal more to say than what is merely found in a few passages, and that's the way it is here. There is more to be said about "faith" than merely admitting there is a God and confessing Jesus as His Son. Faith is far more than that!

Let's go back to John 5:24. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Jesus mentions two things necessary to have eternal life, to pass out of death into life in this verse: First, one must believe in Him who sent Me, that is, believe in God the Father. Second, one must "hear My word." Hearing is not merely hearing. It is hearing and accepting, agreeing, and heeding (or obeying) his word. To hear Jesus means to take Him seriously enough to do His will.

Jesus has always asked people to hear His word. It is difficult to see how anyone can say, "I believe in Jesus," if they are not willing to believe what He says. Jesus once asked, "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). To call Jesus 'Lord' and yet fail to do His will is lip service. It is to talk the talk but not walk the walk. Jesus said the wise man *hears* His words and *does them*, while the foolish man hears His words and *does not do them* (Matt. 7:24-27). There is a real difference between a man who claims to believe and a man who actually lives out what he believes.

James said in James 1:22-25, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does." The blessing of God is for the man who lives his faith, not just talks it. The doer of the word is the one who is blessed by God!

James asks in the next chapter (2:14-18), "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled'; and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body; what use is that?" James concludes, "Even so, faith, if it has no

works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'" No one can argue against a shown faith, but James argues strongly against a claimed faith.

James continues, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:19-20) James concludes in 2:26, saying, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." A faith that is unwilling to serve others, unwilling to attend church, unwilling to obey the Lord's commandments is a *dead* faith. As James says, faith is perfected by our actions. It is never enough to talk faith but be unwilling to live it.

The apostle John makes a similar point about our relationship with the Lord in 1 John 2:4-6. "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." Our relationship with the Lord is dependent upon our willingness to prove our faith and love in keeping and abiding in his word. Both James and John declare that claiming to love Jesus while ignoring his word is merely a delusion. Be real; be genuine.

What about Romans 10:9-10, doesn't that mean that faith and confession are all that is necessary to be saved? These verses say, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." But we must read all that the book of Romans says. In Romans 10:16 Paul said, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, '*Lord*, who has believed our report?'" You see, when Romans speaks of faith, it is thinking not merely of belief but also of obedience.

In Romans 1:5, at the beginning of the book, Paul said, "we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the *obedience* of faith." The "obedience of faith," the obedience that arises out of faith, was important to Paul. Where many people stumble is that they confuse the works of the Law or meritorious works with works of obedience. They are not the same. No one can earn his way to heaven, and we are not suggesting that one can. What we are saying is there is a difference between merely believing and an obedient faith; God wants us to have an obedient faith that hears when God speaks.

Many people stumble over the idea that if you do something, anything God asks, you have earned your salvation. But that is not so. In John 9, when the blind man was told to wash in the pool of Siloam, did he by washing "earn" his sight? Why, no! But would he have been able to see without washing? Why, no! Simply because one out of faith complies with a command does not mean one has earned the blessing. Complying with a command merely shows that we trust God enough to do as He says. Obedience is trust and love in action. There is never a dispute whether a person trusts God or loves God, when you see that love and trust acting in his/her life.

"Faith" is a package word. It actually refers to the whole, trusting response to God. All that God does for us may truly be called "grace," and all that we do for God may truly be called "faith." Faith and obedience are often used synonymously in the Bible. For instance, John 3:36 says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who *does not obey* the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." In Scripture believing is obeying; and if one will not obey, one does not really, fully believe. When we think of what

pleases God, the idea that one should believe but doesn't need to obey is never contemplated in Scripture

In Mark 3, Jesus was teaching near home, and his mother and brothers came to take custody of him, because they thought he had lost his senses. Jesus asked, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" He looked on those who sitting around Him and said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:31-34). In Luke 11:28, Jesus said, "blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." He blesses those who take his word seriously enough to keep it carefully.

This is why Jesus emphasizes in John 14 that the one who loves Him keeps His commandments. In John 14:15, he said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Now some people believe that as long as you love the Lord, it doesn't make any difference what you believe. But that idea directly contradicts this verse. Here loving the Lord means listening to His commandments and keeping them. "Loving" means caring enough to listen to the Lord, to hear what He actually has to say and then to do it. How can we imagine that we "love" the Lord, when we haven't even paid attention to what He teaches and don't know whether we obeyed Him?

Believing and loving the Lord means taking Him seriously enough to listen to everything He says everyday. If we love the Lord with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our might, we will put Him first in everything. We will trust His promises and take his commands to heart. Faith does not allow the world to edit or to discredit what Jesus says. Faith doesn't say, "I'll obey you when I agree with you." Faith trusts the Lord enough to do His will whether he agrees with the Lord or not and whether he understands the Lord or not.

Joshua may not have understood why he needed to march around Jericho, but the walls came tumbling down.

The blind man may not have understood how he would be able to see by washing in the pool of Siloam, but he came back seeing.

Moses and Israel may not have understood how God parted the waters of the Red Sea, but they passed through on dry ground.

You may not understand how God forgives sins in baptism. You may even have heard people say that one can be saved without baptism. Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Wouldn't it be more trustful, show more faith, to do what Jesus said that to argue with Him?

Believing Jesus means that we stop arguing with Him and start listening to Him. Some people are willing to believe Him, but add an "if," "and," or "but." They figure they can negotiate and bargain their

salvation with the Lord. They think they can live any way they wish and in the end can still find salvation. That is not faith.

Jesus is Lord, and believing in Him means that we quit challenging Him with our own judgments. Remember, "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). To believe and trust in Him means that we are willing to let His judgments stand in our lives, even when we do not understand them.

If you are not willing to let Jesus be your Lord as well as your Savior, you really do not have the kind of faith and trust to be saved. Don't fool yourself. Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves. James said that in humility we are to "receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). The faith that pleases the Lord is first humble, realizing that God is God, who knows all, sees all, and is wiser than we. Let's trust Him enough to listen to do all that He commands with love in our hearts. Considering what Jesus did for us, that's the least we can do. Won't you trust the Lord?

Faith leads a person to obey the Lord in every respect. If I believe in the Lord, I love and trust Him. That means I want to be right with Him, to be saved and go to heaven when I die.

If I believe in Jesus, I'll confess to the whole world that He is the Christ, the Son of living God and my Lord. I'll want everyone to know.

If I believe in Jesus and call Him Lord, I'll change my heart and life. I will repent of every sin. I won't want to live a rebellious and displeasing life before God but to honor Him by living according to His teaching.

If I believe in Jesus, I will be baptized as He taught that I should in Mark 16:16. I want to be born of water and the Spirit in baptism to enter His kingdom (John 3:5). I want to be baptized have my sins washed away (Acts 22:16). I want to be crucified with Him in baptism so that I can rise to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-7). With humility I'll do what the Lord says without trying to argue I can be saved a different way. I'll trust Him to the point that whatever He says, I'll do. Won't you also believe strongly enough to obey the word of the Lord in every respect?

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