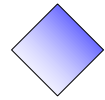


The Voice of Truth



April 28, 2013

"Can 'Faith Alone' Save Him?"

By Jimmy Pettigrew

Yes, we are well aware of the fact that many believe and teach that, "man is saved by faith alone is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." *"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?"* (**Jas. 2:14**). Of course, a man is saved by faith! Without it, it would be impossible to please God (**Heb. 11:6**). We are saved by faith (**Jno. 3:16**). Faith is necessary to get one to God's power (**Rom. 1:16**). Faith is a must to live the Christian life (**Gal. 2:20**). Faith is not a leap into a religious darkness (**2 Cor. 5:7**). *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (**Rom. 10:17**). So the New Testament teaches consistently we are saved by faith.

But, we also know that it is not faith alone. Take a moment to look at what James is saying in (**Jas. 2:14**). He was asking if a do nothing, inactive, all talk and no work faith could save. Can that faith save him? NO, it cannot! *"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"* (**Jas. 2:24**). Could we find a passage that would state this more clearly? This is as clear as it can be. There are other passages that will prove beyond a doubt that one is not saved by faith alone. *"Nevertheless even of the rulers many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess (it), lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the glory (that is) of men more than the glory (that is) of God"* (**Jno. 12:42-43**). Now this passage says they believed. John said they believed; but that is all they did. Would they be saved? Was it enough? If one is saved by faith alone, these would surely be saved. Faith only, in their case stopped short of confessing Christ. The enormity of that situation is seen in the following teaching of Jesus: *"Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven"* (**Matt. 10:32-33**). No, according to Jesus, faith alone is not enough. Thus, their belief did not avail because it did not lead them on to confess Jesus. Here in **John 12** is an example of some who only believe, and they

are lost.

There is another passage that will prove beyond a doubt that one is not saved by faith alone. *"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love"* (**Gal. 5:6**). Salvation is not by faith alone. True faith expresses itself, it works. Faith working through love. "Love" (agape) occurs here for the first time in this letter. Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments"* (**Jno. 14:15**). The works included in salvation are the commandments of the Lord, obedience to which is absolutely essential to salvation. *"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (**1 Jno. 2:4**). Faith blesses only when it leads its possessor to obedience. **Chapter 11** of **Hebrews** is Inspiration's Hall of Fame. Numerous examples of great faith are offered by the inspired penman and in each instance the mention of the faith of its immortal heroes is followed by a verb of action. "By faith Abel offered ...," "By faith Noah... prepared an ark . . .," "By faith Abraham... obeyed ..." Faith will save us only when we allow it to lead us on to the full acceptance of the will of God as expressed through His commandments (**Matt. 7:21**). *"Shew me thy faith without thy works"* (**Jas. 2:18**). Such is impossible, faith cannot be seen; its existence is evidenced only through the works which it produces. *"I will shew thee my faith by my works"* (**Jas. 2:18**). *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"* (**Jas. 2:21**). How was he justified? Not merely by a profession, but by works of faith. *"Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"* (**Jas. 2:22**). *"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"* (**Jas. 2:24**). In other words, his faith itself was counted as an act of obedience.

Notice another passage. **John 1:12** says, *"But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, (even) to them that believe on his name."*

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Can words be clearer? If you believe in Christ you have the right or power **TO BECOME** a child of God. You are not a child of God by faith alone; you have the **right to become one**.

The Bible says one must believe Jesus is the Christ to be saved (**Jno. 8:24**). But that is not all. It also says he must repent of his sins (**Lk. 13:3-5; Acts 3:19**). Repentance is a change of mind regarding sin with a view to amend one's life. But that is not all. The Bible teaches that one must confess his faith that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God (**Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Tim. 6:12**). Having done that, one more thing more follows. One must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins to be saved (**Mk.**

16:16; Gal. 3:27; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16).

The one who claims to have faith, but will not do the work of the Lord, it is a dead faith! (**Jas. 2:17**). This is the way James would describe such a faith. *"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"* (**Jas. 2:20**). Look again, *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"* (**Jas. 2:26**). James speaks of faith without works as faith alone. But of that faith he will say that it is a dead faith. Now, is man saved by a dead faith? Absolutely not! From this we can conclude that faith alone will not save. The notion that faith alone saved was spawned by the Protestant Reformation. It was an extreme reaction against the meritorious "work salvation" of the Catholic faith. It is a false doctrine! •

Being "Legalistic" about Grace

By Jonathan L. Perz

In an effort to free oneself from the tyranny of "legalism" in his spiritual life, can one actually become "legalistic" with his view of grace (that which is argued as the key to freedom from "legalism")? In other words, can one do the very thing he accuses others of, just on the opposite end of the spectrum?

In any reaction, there is the danger to overreact. In an effort to avoid clumsily knocking over one thing, have you ever knocked over something else? There is reaction ... and there is overreaction. The same applies to spiritual matters.

To deny that spiritual laws are made where none exist would be folly. Jesus condemned it in the first century, among the Jews (**Matt. 15:8-9**), and it is still condemned both in principle and application today (**cf. Acts 15:22-24**).

Nevertheless, this same practice has a way of manifesting itself on both ends of any issue, disagreement or argument. We tend to overreact and either make laws where God has not made laws, or we loose where God has not given us liberty. Both are equally dangerous. Sometimes it is in defense of a position, other times the "law" becomes the position itself. Sometimes we limit the application of such laws to ourselves (which can be okay — **cf. Rom. 14:22-23**), but at other times we try to apply those laws to all generally (an area in which we have no legislative authority from God — **Jas. 4:12**). We must be careful of such overreactions.

I believe such overreactions exist on the topic of God's grace, as it relates to faith and law.

On one hand, some are promising liberty from "legalism" only to become enslaved in a corrupted form of the gospel—a form where God's law, given through Christ and/or Moses, is relegated to second class status. The doctrine basically states, based on passages such as **Ephesians 2, Romans 3-4, and Galatians 2-5**, that we are saved by grace, and not law-keeping (i.e., works). Therefore, law-keeping of any sort (whether perfect or imperfect) and of any law (whether the "Law of Moses" or the "law of Christ") cannot justify ... and therefore does not justify. There are many more specific arguments, but this is the view in a nutshell.

On the other hand, there are those who profess Christ who argue that we are saved by law-keeping. In my circle of influence, I do not know anyone who argues this to its extreme, but the argument does exist, of that I am certain. They don't dismiss grace entirely, but the arguments, when consistently applied, essentially marginalize grace to second-class status. Such arguments emphasize works to the neglect of appreciating God's grace. They insist that the keeping of God's law is paramount, and by virtue, reject the role of trusting in God (faith) and relying on His offering for sin (grace).

We must acknowledge a variety of degrees exists in between these two extremes. While some lean one way or the other, most are simply wrestling with the relationship between grace, law, and faith as taught in the Gospel (most notably Paul's and James' epistles).

Having been involved in many discussions on these

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topics, I have drawn a few conclusions that I think are worthy of consideration.

1) Much of the confusion about the relationship between grace, law and faith hinges on generalizing inspired texts which deal with specific issues. This is not always due to an overreaction. It is often a reaction to the preeminent doctrines of Luther and Calvin regarding law, faith and grace. It also includes concerns about eternal assurance, legislating where God has not legislated or loosing where God has not granted liberty, dealing with sins of ignorance, the binding of traditions as law, et al.

Independent of these reactions, the question remains, what were Paul and James referring to when they wrote of the relationship between law, grace and faith? The simple and balanced approach views law, faith and grace equally as they relate to justification. One is no more important than the other.

If we generalize Paul's writings on "law" and "works" to include "ALL law" and "ALL works," we introduce inconsistencies into all apostolic writings. We must then clarify those inconsistencies. As good as some of these clarifications may be, they still leave one glaring inconsistency. "Justification by faith" in Christ either includes "works" or it does not include "works." If Paul's argument encompasses "ALL works," then there is absolutely nothing we must do to be justified and remain justified. If we include "obedience" in the phrase "by faith," we have just belied our position that Paul's words include "ALL works." We cannot have it both ways and remain consistent.

If we leave Paul's arguments in their specific context—the exact problem Peter said some were having with Paul's writings (**2 Pet. 3:14-16**)—then Paul's words make complete sense. Paul's consistent and overall argument is that we are "justified by faith in Christ," and "not by works of the Law" of Moses. Boasting in one's baptism cannot be proven as a first century problem. Boasting in one's circumcision can not only be proven as a real problem (**cf. Acts 15:1-5**), it is also systemic to the change of covenant taking place at the time.

2) While not specifically arguing that we are saved by grace only or by faith only, many are definitely leaning strongly in that direction. In efforts to justify their position, which is an overreaction to the problems we cited earlier, they are exhibiting the exact behavior they condemn in others. They are being "legalistic" about grace. As such, I would even go so far as to say, they are being "legalistic"

about their "anti-legalism."

This irony demonstrates that they are essentially making laws about grace where laws do not exist. For instance, in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, Paul writes, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*" Is Paul saying that absolutely no works are involved in salvation? Is Paul really arguing that being saved by grace through faith means we must do nothing? Does such really harmonize with the rest of Paul's teaching and practice? Is Peter's practice at odds with Paul's teaching when, in telling Cornelius "words by which [he] and all [his] household will be saved" (**Acts 11:14**), he actually "**commanded** them to be baptized" (**Acts 10:48**—emphasis mine, jlp)? Is baptism not a work (one vehemently at contention in this issue today)? Why command the work of baptism if it was wholly unnecessary to be saved (based on a generalization of Paul's view of "works" to include "ALL works")?

Going one step further, what does it mean to be "saved by faith"? If one admits, as most do, that faith includes some works (baptism, confession, repentance, and even belief itself), then they have surrendered their position that we are not justified by ANY WORKS. As one aptly illustrated, "I have never had somebody come up from the watery grave of baptism saying, "Look what I did!" So, we all agree that works play an intrinsic role in our salvation, but works of the law of Moses do not!

Now, in all fairness, a distinction is made between works necessary to come to Christ, and works necessary to stay in Christ. Some would argue that once one has been baptized for the forgiveness of sins, such as the Ephesians, they don't stay saved by their law-keeping, but by grace through faith. Again, I believe we are being legalistic about grace to make such a distinction. The only distinction I can find delineated in the New Testament is that instead of being baptized again for the remission of sins, John instructs that all a Christian who has sinned must do to walk in the light is confess his sins (and by implication, repent of them) and he will find forgiveness and cleansing (**1 John 1:8-2:2; cf. Prov. 28:13**).

Yet, by arguing that those who are saved stay saved by grace through faith apart from ALL WORKS (and not just works of the law of Moses, as I believe Paul to actually be arguing) they are even excluding confession (and repentance) as a work. Ironically, there are other false doctrines to justify this erroneous conclusion as well. Nevertheless,

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the proponents of such thinking, based on their uninspired "law" have essentially nullified John's inspired and plain teaching.

3) It is important to note that while there are indeed varying nuances on these positions, these nuances are unnecessary. We don't have to get "legalistic" about grace to say we are "saved by grace through faith" ... nor do we have to get "legalistic" about works to say works play a role in our salvation. We simply need to leave Paul's words in their first century context, where he contrasts justification by "faith in Christ" and justification by the "Law of Moses," and avoid generalizing them to speak of ALL LAW and ALL WORKS in contrast to faith generally.

We do not have to tap dance around explanations about the relationship of law, grace and faith. We do not have to break out our best "legaleze" to explain why works do not have a role in our salvation or why works do indeed have a role in our salvation. We don't have to exercise our incredible skills in mental gymnastics to explain why Paul argues Abraham was justified apart from works (Rom. 4:1-5) and James argues Paul was justified by works (Jas. 2:21).

tians (both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians) that they were saved by "faith in Christ" and not by "works of the Law of Moses" (cf. Acts 15:1-5, and note the entire premise of the book of Hebrews). If anything, James is making the general argument about "justification by works" and it is actually in the affirmative, not the negative!!! His argument is that we are not saved by faith alone, but by faith and works. "You see then that a man **IS** justified by works, and not by faith only" (Jas. 2:24, emphasis mine, jlp).

Finally, some argue that there is an inherent and intentional "tension" in these texts. I would agree that perhaps some tension was intentional. I would even agree that it is fine that some tension exists between law, grace and faith, particularly as we try to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). However, it is unacceptable when that tension is artificially and unnecessarily generated by false assumptions regarding inspired writing. It promotes division where division need not exist. If we, as Christians, can't be united on grace, faith and law, wholly and completely, what is it that we can be united on (cf. John 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; Eph. 4:1-6)? Let us examine our faith (2 Cor. 13:5) to be certain that we are rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

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Simply stated, Paul was convincing first century Chris-

*Truth is truth even if no one believes it.
Error is error if everyone believes it.*

*Don't think you can ignore the Lord in this life and
He will give you a crown in the Life to come.*

A pint of example is worth a barrel full of advice.

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

- Hear and Learn - Rom. 10:17 m. 10:9-10 ; 1 Pet. 3:21 ; John 6:45; 17:3
- Believe - Heb. 11:6; John 6:29; 8:24
- Repent - Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19; 17:30
- Confess the Lord - Matt. 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:21
- Be Baptized - Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27
- Continue in the Apostles' Teaching - Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 3:14-17

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Schedule of Assembly

Bible Study: Sunday, 9:00am
Worship Service: Sunday, 10:00am
Bible Study: Wednesday, 7:00pm*

**A song service is held on the last Wednesday of every month*

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