

Are We Saved by Faith Only, Or An Obedient Faith?

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This is an easy question to answer and easy for anyone to understand who has a normal mentality and an honest desire for the saving truth. If we believe what God has given us through His inspired word, we should have no problem with the question at all. The main problem seems to be that people are following the teachings of men (some willingly, others are deceived), and not what God says in His word.

God, through His inspired writer James, tells us plainly: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). We are not justified, i.e. saved, by "faith only." And please do not allow the false teachers (1 John 4:1) to deceive you by explaining away the truth on this matter or any other. You, my friend, have God's word on it. You can read and understand for yourself (cp. Eph. 3:4) the verses and the context.

Let us check the context, which is all important. In verse 14 we find that salvation is under consideration as James is proving that faith without works is dead. In verses 15 and 16 (please read), James is giving a common sense illustration of faith without works: "There is no profit to it at all" is the force of the rhetorical question. James' conclusion is: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). This is seen throughout the remainder of this chapter. James also gives us an example of faithful and obedient servant of God: Abraham (v. 21-24).

Throughout the ages some have tried to discredit the book of James in some form or fashion because they do not like or understand the truth, claiming James is in conflict with Paul. Such is not true at all and comes from a misunderstanding of Paul's writings, whether willingly (cp. 2 Pet. 3:5ff) or otherwise. Note what Peter wrote in 2 Pet. 3:16: "As also in all his [Paul's, v.15] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" This is certainly true of those who "twist" or "wrest" Paul's words to try and get out of them "faith only" salvation!

Let us examine some of Paul's writings on this matter. It is the book of Romans that most people run to when trying to justify "faith only" salvation. **Does Romans teach salvation by "faith only"?** No, it does not, not at all. Paul shows

in the beginning of the book, near the end of the book and many times throughout the book the kind of faith that we must have: it is an **obedient faith**. Such is easily understood whenever you keep things in their proper context. Note a few statements: "..., for **obedience to the faith** among all nations, for his name:" (Rom. 1:5); "... to all nations for the **obedience of faith**:" (Rom. 16:26); "..., but ye have **obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine** which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17); "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who **walk** not after the flesh, but **after the Spirit**" (Rom. 8:1). "Walk" is showing action, obedience to the teaching of God given by the Holy Spirit. There are many things in the book of Romans showing these things.

Let us now consider some **remote context**. Note Acts 6:7, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were **obedient to the faith**." Well now, will those who try to discredit the book of James also try to discredit the book of Acts because they do not like this verse and many others like it? What we have is perfect unity among all Bible writers – as is to be expected from a book from God. The book of Acts is often referred to as the book of conversions. And in every conversion account where much detail is given, you will find that the people were obedient to the faith or gospel. As the Hebrew writer said: "And being made perfect, he [Jesus, v.8] became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that **obey him**;" (Heb. 5:9).

What did Jesus Himself say? "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 7:21). The first part of this verse goes along with "faith only" (they shall not be saved) and the second part fits perfectly with "salvation through an obedient faith" (they shall be saved).

Paul did not contradict James, but if he ever taught salvation by "faith only" he would have not only contradicted James but himself and God as well.

Consider some of Paul's writings other than in Romans. "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that **obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ:" (2 Thess. 1:8). No "faith only" salvation is here or anywhere else in the Bible! Also: "... to the obedience of Christ;" (2 Cor. 10:5); "... to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled" (v.6); "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth,...?" (Gal. 3:1); and back to Romans: "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. ...?" (Rom. 10:16 cp. 1:16).

There are several causes for misunderstanding the Bible: I think one of the main reasons is lack of study. Too many people rely on “their preachers” to lead them in the right direction. This is a most dangerous situation and contrary to God’s will for we all have the responsibility to study and “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21). Second to that is not studying the context. Some parts of the book of Romans is taken out of context by those seeking “faith only” justification, especially parts of chapters 3, 4, 10.

For example: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). **First:** the verse does not say by “faith only,” as some would have you to believe, it says by “faith.” What kind of faith? Paul tells us in Romans 1:5; 16:26, etc., that we must obey that system of faith or law. **Second:** “the law” under consideration, in verse 28, is the law of the old covenant or testament, which Paul shows in many different ways that we are no longer under that law (cp. Rom. 7:6, 7; Gal. 3:19-27, etc.). We are under the new law, “law of faith” (Rom. 3:27). One must be obedient to the law which one is under (cp. 1 John 3:4).

A few things to remember: Scripture will never contradict Scripture; inspired writer will never contradict inspired writer. Man has never been without law from God and where there is transgression of law there is sin (1 John 3:4). Commands of God must be obeyed: there are no non-essential commands!

Please compare Romans 3 and 4 to what Paul said in Galatians 5:6, "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." ♥