

Where's the Work in the Water?

What is My Attitude Towards Faith and Works in My Salvation?

Intro:

- I. **One of the most** frequently debated issues in religion, as well as one of the oldest, is the issues surrounding Faith and Works: Are we saved by faith? Or are we saved by works?
 - I. Some, when stating the case for faith, would say something to the effect of: "There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation, so to say that God requires works from us is to undermine His Grace:
 - II. Others, when stating the case for works, would say something like, "The Bible clearly states that Faith is not enough, God expects us to work for our salvation."
 - III. What I hope we will be to explain to our friends after reminding ourselves of some passages tonight, is that what the Bible teaches is somewhere in the middle of those two statements:
- II. **So many misunderstandings** in these discussions, stem from how much the arguments have changed over time: It seems to me, from reading various religious writers from over the years, that the doctrine of saved by faith alone has shifted from simply how one is saved, and has evolved into how one lives their life as well.
 - I. Now certainly, we don't want to make a blanket accusation of all our religious friends, but for many, the ultimate application of being saved by Faith alone is something like this:
 - I. As long as I have faith in Jesus, I can pretty much live how I want because the Bible says we are not justified by works.
 - II. And that is unfortunate, because it doesn't to justice to all parties involved:
 - I. While many of the church reformers in Martin Luther's day were certainly misguided, their transition towards salvation by faith alone was not because they had a disregard for following God's will, but was by and large a reaction to the abuse of works on the part of the Catholic church.
 - I. It is not that they just wanted to live however they desired, and so tried to downplay the importance of works

II. Without trying to oversimplify, here were a lot of good men, who because of a misrepresentation of works by the religious powers, went in the completely opposite direction:

II. But it also isn't fair, because it does not fairly address the belief of many who hold that works play a part in salvation, because it assumes that they believe works are either the only important part, or at least the most important part in salvation:

I. Which in all fairness sometimes feels like an attitude many in the Church have, perhaps is its own reaction to so much abuse of faith:

III. So what are our goals for tonight? I'd like for us to approach this from the ground up and ask the question: How do faith and works combine in our salvation? To do so I want us to look at four areas:

I. Make sure that we are using "work" in the same way that scripture does

II. Look at examples of God bringing salvation to individuals, and groups of people by asking them to do works-- and seeing what part faith played

III. Progressing into how this applies to baptism, look at the teaching of the Lord and how it paved the way for Baptism to be a manifestation of faith

IV. The purpose of Baptism: Does scripture ever say that it earns salvation?

i. How Does the Bible Use "Work"?

i. Paul: We are not saved by works

1. We must first establish the context of Paul's teaching:

2. Much of Paul's work was spent undoing the perverted teaching of Jewish False teachers among the gentiles:

i. Circumcision was one area that Paul had to spend a lot of his time on:

1. There were two basic parts to the false doctrine that was spread among the Gentiles:

1. Circumcision was something that must still be kept by the Gentiles if they wished to be part of God's people

2. There was something in the physical act of circumcision itself that brought you into a relationship with God

2. Here are a couple of examples of Paul confronting that teaching:
 1. Galatians 5:1-6: Paul states that forcing the Gentiles to keep circumcision as a part of their salvation would nullify the Cross
 2. Acts 15: Paul and Barnabas would debate the Jews over whether the Gentiles had to be circumcised or not
2. **Food Restrictions and the Sabbath** were another area that Paul spent much of his time combatting efforts of Jews to place portions of the Old Law on to Gentiles:
 1. There were a host of different foods that until Acts 10, God's people had been commanded to refrain from, as well as numerous feast days, and the command to rest on the Sabbath:
 1. Colossians 2:16-23 Paul exhorts those gentile brethren to not let themselves be judged in regards to eating what had been cleansed or not holding to old feasts:
3. **So what was Paul trying** to explain with this teaching? Many take it to be a contrast, that under the Old Law men were justified by their works, but under the New Law justification was given:
 1. This is not the case: Rather Paul is attempting to explain to both Jews and Gentiles that whether under the Old or New, it was not simply the doing of a work that justified one before God:
 1. Paul never taught that it was wrong to be circumcised: Acts 16:3 tells us that he circumcised Timothy for the sake of some Jews there
 1. In I Cor. 9:19-23, Paul would explain such actions as being a necessary sacrifice to reach all through the gospel
 2. What Paul did teach is that even under the Old Law, the act of circumcision was not what brought men justification before God:
 3. Phil. 3:1-3 Paul taught that those who put their confidence in the flesh, were of the "false circumcision"
 2. Neither did Paul teach that it was wrong to abstain from certain foods: 1 Cor. 8

1. But Paul did teach that the idea that abstaining from food could justify man before God was foolish: Col. 2:21-23
 2. **Again, the point** of these examples is to show that Paul's teaching about works, that are used by so many to preach Faith only, are taken out of context: These were dealing with specific issues:
 1. Hammering home that the system of justification hadn't changed: The old Law proved that man could not earn salvation through works
 2. Paul would use that to show why Jesus' sacrifice was so powerful: He did what no one else could do:
 3. Romans 3:27, Gal. 2:16
 3. Paul's overall point isn't that works have no part in our service to God, but even though we were created to do good works, God has made it clear through the Old Law that those works are not what Justify man:
 1. Eph. 2:8-10, 2 Cor. 3:5, Lk 17:10
 2. Paul's goal was to create in the Gentiles an Obedient faith: Rom. 1:5
- 2. James: Works Are a Part of Salvation:**
1. As with Paul, the context of James' teaching must first be established
 1. Like Paul, James had specific goals in mind with his teaching:
 2. It may have been that James was addressing some of the early forms of Gnosticism like we spoke of last night:
 3. But overall, James' goal is anything but undermining the importance of Faith in the life of a Christian: Rather James worked very hard to get Christians to have active and living faiths: Faiths that can be seen in action:
 2. In the same way that Paul was not arguing that the Old Law justified through works, James is not arguing that the New Law justified by works:
 1. James does not promote the idea of a work being used like a currency to obtain Justification:
 2. He promotes that works are acts of obedience to commands given by the Lord Christians claim to have faith in : James 1:21-25
 3. James taught that works were a demonstration of a faith that is living: Trying to emphasize that one can have a faith that is dead: James 2:14-26

4. It is also important to point out, that in the same way that Paul never said we are saved by faith alone, James never says we are saved by works alone: James 2:22: Faith working with works:

3. James working With Paul:

1. God's people have never been saved by works on their part:
2. Under the Old Law, works were acts of obedience to keep a covenant based on faith
3. As God's New People, in a New Covenant, He still requires His people to demonstrate their faith through acts of obedience: Eph. 2:10, James 2:18
4. This perfectly in keeping with the teaching of Jesus: John 14:15&21

4. Is the common use of Work the Biblical one?

1. Common: A good deed that one performs in the hope that it will pay the price of sins in the sight of God
2. Biblical: An act of obedience to God's law that demonstrates our faith in Him to keep the Covenants He has made with us

2. God Has Always Asked for "Insufficient Works"

1. Israel and the Bronze Serpent: Numbers 21:1-9

1. Their Situation: After granting Israel victory of Arad, the Lord was moved to anger by the people bringing an unjust grievance against Him, and by their despising the mana and quail
 1. They were completely condemned before Him: They were worthy of the death that God sent among them:
 2. No amount of worship, sacrifice, song, or good deeds could justify them before God:
2. Their Solution: God required that two works be performed
 1. First that Moses would construct a Bronze serpent and erect it before the people
 2. Second the people should look on and gaze at the serpent to be saved from their affliction
3. What brought salvation to the people?

1. Were they saved by their faith? Believing that looking to the serpent would save them would accomplish nothing if they didn't look
 2. Were they saved by their works? Nothing in the physical act of turning a head could possibly bring them salvation:
 3. Was it the serpent? Was there something special about the metal?
 4. The people were saved by the work of obeying God's command to look at the serpent, which was a demonstration of their Faith in God's promise of deliverance;
 1. Take special note that this combination of faith working with works took place under the Old law: the system of Justification hasn't changed!
2. **In passing**, recall in brief a few similar examples:
1. Naaman and Elisha: II Kings 8
 2. Elijah and the Widow's Oil/Flour I Kings 17
 3. Israel and the Walls of Jericho: Joshua 6
3. Each one of these demonstrates the biblical definition of works pleasing God
1. Each person was confronted with a need that only God could supply
 2. In each situation, an act of obedience was required before God's power could be demonstrated
 3. In each instance there was nothing in the act itself that was worthy of God's blessing
 4. In each instance the work had to be paired with Faith on the worker's part that God would keep his promise, even though they were doing nothing worthy of earning it:
3. **The Teachings of the Lord Paved the Way for Baptism:**
1. Consider the Unjust Servant: Matthew 18:23-25
 1. Think about the implications of this parable on forgiveness in regards to faith and works:
 1. The Servant had an enormous debt that could never be paid back: 18:24
 2. There was nothing in the deed of asking for more time in v 26, that justified him before his master

3. As soon as that servant's good works ceased, he was no longer justified before his master
2. The Prodigal son: Like 15:11-24
 1. The son had sinned grievously against his father: 15:12-13
 2. The Son had faith that his father would take him back 15:17-19
 3. Nothing about the son's plea made up for what he had done to the father
 4. But until he made the decision to get up and do something about it, his faith in the father was meaningless
 1. *Wrap Up: WE have been working our way towards an ultimate application: We've examined what the Biblical definition of works is: acts of obedience that demonstrate a living faith in God to keep His promises: And seen that God out of his endless grace, responds to these insignificantly small acts with incredible outpourings of salvation: Jesus and the apostles continued to teach that God still interacts with people this way, despite a changing of covenant: As we conclude, lets apply those principles to the act of baptism:*

4. Baptism is Required for Salvation, but Does not Earn it:

1. There is nothing in the act of baptism that could possibly justify us before God, as with the serpent and Naaman:
2. There is no Biblical teaching that Baptism pays the price for Sins: Jesus' blood was that price
3. The scripture teaches that Baptism is an act of Obedience that one must do to receive the benefit of that price being paid
4. For one to truly believe, that simply by being immersed in water, allows access to complete forgiveness of sins and everlasting life: is the ultimate example of a living faith demonstrated by works: You cannot see your sins being washed away:

Conclusion:

- It is extremely important, not only in our discussions with our religious neighbors, but for our own understanding of God's word, that we are able to accurately handle what the Bible says about Faith and Works:
- We must be careful that in our efforts to combat false doctrines like Faith only, that we don't swing in the opposite direction, and place works on a pedestal above Faith