

Faith Works To Be Saved

As we begin to look at James' letter related to our faith and works, there must be a clear understanding of what allows mankind to reap the benefits of salvation – it is only by the grace of God! Paul is clear in his letter to the Ephesian brethren that there is absolutely nothing that man can do to earn salvation. *“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”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). Paul states that salvation is from God and it is not a direct result of our works. And yet James states that saving faith is directly related to works. *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:26). So how do we correlate the two thoughts?

As I began to review the scripture in James (James 2:14-26), and thought of various men and organizations on this subject and read the multitude of ideas, I began to think about “Man vs. Wild” and “Man vs. Food” where man is continually testing himself against nature or different kinds of food. When man looks to God's word and chooses to add their own thoughts, or reference only certain scripture(s) rather than the whole of God's word, then it turns into “Man vs. God”. Whose side will we be on?

Paul reminds Timothy that *“all scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). All of God's word must be read, and meditated upon, for man to come to an understanding of God's will. In reading all of God's word, we (man) must determine if the things taught and the things done are in accordance with His will. It's not about me, it's all about God.

SAVING FAITH IS AN ACTIVE FAITH

As James notes, *“...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”* (James 2:17). It is clear that James writes that for an individual to have an active (i.e. live) faith, there must be works associated with it. The transliterated word for “works” is “*ergon*” and the same word is used in James 2 (vs. 14-26) and Ephesians 2 (vs. 9 – *“not of works”*). The definition of “works” is: an act, deed, thing done; the idea of working is emphasized in opposition to that which is less than work.” So the “works” called out in both of these scriptures is an act, deed, or thing done. Most religious people who identify with the Christian faith will agree that action is associated with faith. The main difference related to the discussion of faith and works is in the correlation related to man's salvation. How is one saved – by faith, by works, or by a combination of faith and works? Reminder of what was stated above: the scripture is clear that man can do absolutely nothing to earn salvation - so it is clear that works alone cannot save.

But some state that for God's grace to become a part of your life, you must say a “sinner's prayer.” So let's look at this...

- A. _____ (Note the scripture where the word of God states that God's grace, your salvation, comes from stating something like, “Dear Lord Jesus, I realize that I am a sinner and have broken your laws. I understand that my sin has separated me from

you. I am sorry and I ask you to forgive me. I accept the fact that your son Jesus Christ died for me, was resurrected, and is alive today and hears my prayers. I now open my heart's door and invite Jesus in to become **my** Lord and **my** Savior. I give Him control and ask that He would rule and reign in my heart so that His perfect will would be accomplished in my life. In Jesus name I pray. Amen. (copied from Jimmy Swaggart Ministries website). This concept of saying a prayer and being saved is not taught in God's word.

- B. If works is defined as "an act, deed, or thing done", and if a person must state the above prayer for salvation to result, could it not be said that their "action" of praying saved them?

Others state that a person only has to believe and they will be saved. They quote verses such as John 3:16 and 6:47 and state that all one has to do to be saved is believe in Jesus. But looking at other scriptures within God's word, what else saves us?

- Mark 16:16 – "He who _____ and is _____ will be saved..."
- John 10:9 – "If anyone _____ by _____, he will be saved..."
- Acts 2:21 – "...whosoever _____ on the name of the LORD shall be saved."
- Acts 15:11 – "...through the _____ of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved"
- Acts 16:31 – "_____ on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..."
- Romans 8:24 – "For we are saved in this _____..."
- Romans 10:9 – "...if you _____ with your mouth....and _____ in your heart....you will be saved."
- Romans 10:10 – "...with the mouth _____ is made unto salvation."
- Romans 10:13 – "For whoever _____ on the name of the LORD shall be saved."
- 1 Cor. 15:1-2 – "...I declare to you the _____ which I preached to you...by which also you are saved..."
- Ephesians 2:5 – "...by _____ you have been saved."
- Ephesians 2:8 – "For by _____ you have been saved through faith..."
- 1 Peter 3:21 – "There is also an antitype which now saves us - _____
...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"

So based on scripture, looking throughout God's word, there are multiple things that save us. If a person states that only belief is necessary, they are not looking at other scripture and seeing what God has communicated through inspired writers. They are stating man's way and need to be focused on God's way.

The Hebrew writer states that, "*But 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*" (Hebrews 11:6). Is "diligently seeking" something an act, deed, thing done (i.e. works)? If a person does not diligently seek God, would this person be pleasing to God? Saving faith is an active faith. It is a faith that acts on love, trust, and obedience.

FAITH ACTS ON LOVE

John reminds us that love is of God and God is love (1 John 4:7-8). John defines love in the action of God loving mankind and sending His Son “*to be the propitiation of our sins*” (1 John 4:10). We love God because He first loved us. But our love must be based on the right motives. We can have actions (i.e. works) that are wonderful but will be worthless if we don’t have love in our lives.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, illustrates the importance of having faith in love. Although Christians in Corinth could speak in tongues, prophecy, have all knowledge, and perform multiple acts of kindness, if these things were not done in love, they are all worthless.

1 Corinthians 13: 1-3

- Action: speaking in tongues of men and angels...but have not love, utterings are useless.
- Action: prophesying, understanding mysteries, having faith to move mountains...but have not love, you are nothing.
- Action: bestowing goods to feed the poor, sacrificing body...but have not love, it profits nothing.

Genuine faith is loving the “*substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). Genuine faith will also “*praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 1:7-9), whom we love even though we haven’t seen Him with our own eyes. This true love that is based on our faith in Jesus Christ will lead us to stop living for ourselves and begin living for Christ. Paul reminds us that the love of Christ should compel us, who now live because Christ died for all, to “*live no longer to themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Our faith should lead us to love God more. Jesus tells the disciples that a person could show no greater love than to lay down one’s life for his friends (John 15:13). Jesus became the sacrificial lamb, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29) and became worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because He was slain, and has redeemed us to God by His blood (Rev. 5:8-10). Sometimes we fear what we cannot see. But there should be no fear in perfect love and Christ’s love was perfect. And because He first loved us, we love Him (1 John 4:17-18).

Our faith should lead us to love our fellow man more. Paul reminds the brethren in Rome that they were to love without hypocrisy (Romans 12:9) or a true sincere love. It’s a love that is evident in actions and not just words. They were to be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, giving preference to one another, patient in tribulation, distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality, blessing those who persecuted them, repaying no one evil for evil, and not avenging themselves. They were not to be overcome with evil, but were to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:10-21). These acts would demonstrate and were to be evidence of their love toward God and their fellow man. If they did not perform these “acts”, would they be in an acceptable relationship with God? Did these “acts” in and of themselves put them in a right relationship with God – NO! But these acts are necessary for true followers of

God! The love that we have and demonstrate for God will lead us into a more trusting relationship with our Father. Because God loves us, we can trust in His unfailing love and rejoice in His salvation (Psalm 13:5).

FAITH ACTS ON TRUST

Merriam-Webster defines trust as “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.” As our love for God continues to grow based on His character, ability, strength, and truth, where else should we put our trust? Where else would we want to put our trust but in a God who rules by His power forever and whose eyes observe the nations (Psalm 66:7)?

King David begins at least five of his Psalms (7:1, 11:1, 16:1, 31:1, 71:1) with words like, “*In You, O LORD, I put my trust.*” David writes that he was not ashamed to put his trust in the LORD because he knew that the LORD would deliver him in His righteousness (Psalm 31:1). David goes on to explain why he was willing to put his complete trust in the LORD; the LORD was his rock of salvation, his fortress of defense for salvation, his strength, and his redeemer (Psalm 31:2-5). David was willing to commit his spirit to the LORD (Psalm 31:5) because of his trust in the LORD.

Our Lord Jesus Christ also showed this full trust in the Father. As our Lord approached His death, knowing the pain and agony that He would have to endure, He prayed that this cup might be taken away from Him (Luke 22:42). Yet He was willing to put His trust in the Father when He states, “*nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.*” He acted upon that trust by giving up His own desire, and accepting the Father’s desire. On the cross, as His final breath approached, He placed His complete trust in the Father’s hands, “*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit*” (Luke 23:46). The ultimate example of trust from our Lord is an example for His followers.

So how does our faith act on trust? Our trust in the Lord should cause us to act!

- A. **Lay** all your cares upon the Lord! Peter states that a follower of Christ must humble themselves and cast “*all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:7). Once we stop trying to do things by our own strength, God will guide us to new heights. We need to move our attitude from worry to worship.
- B. **Think** positive thoughts. A negative attitude will not promote trust between you and God. Paul instructs the brethren at Philippi that their thoughts are critical to achieve that peace that God can provide. “*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard, and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you*” (Philippians 4:8-9). The proverbial writer tells us to trust in the Lord with all of our heart, and not to lean on our own understanding. If we acknowledge God in all our ways, He will direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- C. **Pray** that God will help increase your faith and trust in Him. James reminds God’s people that “*the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (James 5:16). In

the example given by James, does God bring the rain or does Elijah's act of prayer bring the rain? Yes.

When we are faced with the trials of this life, act and ask God to give you patience and to help you trust that He knows what's best for you.

No man has ever been disappointed by placing their trust in God. Placing our complete trust in God will lead us to want to be obedient to His word.

FAITH ACTS ON OBEDIENCE

The Hebrew writer gives the reader of God's word a wonderful list of individuals who acted upon their faith and were recognized by God that they died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them..." (Hebrews 11:13). Let's take a look at how these men and women of faith acted upon their faith (Hebrews 11:4-31):

- Abel – **offered** a more excellent sacrifice
- Enoch – **had testimony** that he pleased God
- Noah – **prepared** an ark
- Abraham – **obeyed** to go to a place...not knowing where he was going
- Sarah – **bore** a child
- Isaac – **blessed** Jacob
- Jacob – **blessed** his sons
- Joseph – **made mention** of the departure of the children of Israel and **gave instruction**
- Moses' mother – **hid** Moses for three months
- Moses – **chose** to suffer affliction, **forsook** Egypt, **kept** the Passover
- Children of Israel – **passed** through the Red Sea, **walked** around the walls of Jericho
- Rahab – **received** the spies with peace

In James 2:14-26, James talks about the relationship between faith and works. He specifically mentions Abraham and Rahab. There is approximately 600 years between Abraham and Rahab so there isn't much in common between these two individuals. One came from a background of prominence and one from a background of disgrace. But each, at a crucial moment in time, acted in faith. True faith produces love and trust which leads to obedience.

Many more men and women of faith are noted for their actions in this chapter of faith, yet we don't know their names: they **subdued** kingdoms, **worked** righteousness, **obtained** promises, **stopped** the mouths of lions, **quenched** the violence of fire, **escaped** the edge of the sword, **turned to fight** the armies of the aliens (Hebrews 11:33-34). Faith acts on obedience.

When an individual reads and comes to an understanding of what God requires to get in an acceptable relationship with the Father, the individual's love for God and the trust he places in the Lord will result in acts of obedience. As one **hears** the words of God (Romans 10:17) and **believes** them (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:16), this will lead one to **repent** of the sins that corrupt his soul (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3). **Confessing** your belief that Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 10:10; Acts 8:37) and being **buried in baptism** washing away your sins (Romans 6:4; Mark

16:16; 1 Peter 3:21) will bring those who were strangers from the covenants of promise and having no hope, near to Christ Jesus by His blood (Ephesians 2:11-13).

How can we as Christians continue in the example of those individuals of faith noted in Hebrews chapter 11? By being obedient to God's word in action!

- Worship – Jesus states that the Father is looking for true worshipers, those who **worship** in spirit and truth (John 4:24). If our acts of worship are not in truth, or what is given as an example or instructions within God's word, then our acts are contrary to God's will. If our acts of worship are contrary to God's will, our actions will be an abomination in God's sight (re: Isaiah 1:10-15). Our actions related to our worship must be based on biblical standards. True worshipers will worship (act) based on their faith and trust in the Lord and on what His words instruct.
- Pray – *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thess. 5:17). Daniel made it his custom (i.e. long established practice) to approach the Lord in prayer daily. It was his choice and an action that he performed habitually. Pray is an act that we choose to participate in yet Paul instructs the saints in Philippi to let our requests be made known to God through prayer (Philippians 4:6). By doing so, the peace of God which exceeds anything we can understand, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). If we choose not to have acts of prayer, will we obtain the peace of God?
- Study – *“Be diligent (study – KJV) to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15). Knowledge of God's word is not arrived at through osmosis. Paul states that when we read, the knowledge of the mysteries of Christ can be understood (Ephesians 3:4). Studying God's word, searching the scriptures (Acts 17:11) takes effort and dedication and is an action that should be undertaken by every Christian wanting to become closer to God. How can one draw near to God if His word is not read and meditated upon? If we choose not to study God's word, will we come to an understanding of what God wants of His followers?
- Spreading the good news – Jesus instructs the apostles to go and spread the good news about the Messiah, *“Go and make disciples...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”* (Matthew 28:19-20). The persecuted disciples in Jerusalem were scattered and *“went everywhere preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4). Paul instructs Timothy to *“preach the word”* being ready in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). Because of the love of God and what Christ has done for us, shouldn't we have a desire to spread the good news? If we fail to act in this manner, are we doing what God has called us to do?
- Bearing fruit – Jesus states that the Father is glorified by His disciples bearing much fruit. (John 15:8). Our lives should show evidence that we are bearing the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Paul tells the Galatian brethren that those who are Christ's *“have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Galatians 5:24). Our desire should be to live and act by walking in the spirit (Galatians 5:25) and ridding ourselves of the works of the flesh which will keep us from inheriting the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Conclusion:

The Lord wants His followers to “*be **doers** of the word, and not hearers only*” (James 1:22). Those who hear God’s word and **does** them is like the man who **builds** his foundation on the rock and when the storms of life beat against the house, it will stand because it was founded on the rock (re: Luke 6:46-49). Acting upon God’s word, being obedient to the instructions of God, is an evident expression of deep abiding faith in the promises of God. Paul states that he is “*not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith”*” (Romans 1:16-17).

The righteous, those who love the Lord with all their heart, mind, and soul; who have total trust in the Lord; who react to God’s word and act on the instructions from God in obedience shall continue to live their lives in full belief and confidence in God.

Habakkuk was troubled when the LORD told him that He was bringing the Chaldeans in judgement upon Judah. When he heard and understood what the LORD’s judgment would be upon the disobedient children, his body trembled, his lips quivered at the voice, and rottenness entered his bones. But he knew where his faith was grounded.

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”
(Habakkuk 3:17-19)