

Faith Alone

Most Protestant churches teach the doctrine of justification by faith alone or salvation by faith only. By this, they mean that God grants salvation and forgiveness of sins on the basis of faith without any requirement for works. In other words, the believer in Jesus does not have to do anything other than believe to be saved.

The Bible addresses this doctrine directly in James 2:14-17:

¹⁴What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ¹⁷Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

Dead faith is mere belief that does not result in a change in the believer's behavior. In fact, such belief is not really belief at all, for how can a person claim to believe God's word without acting upon it?

Consider James 1:22-25:

²²But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³For 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; ²⁴for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵But 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 will be blessed in what he does.

Those who teach salvation by faith only may object, citing Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8-9:

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

However, there is no conflict between the writings of Paul and the writings of James. Paul refuted the idea of salvation by works only, saying that a person cannot brag about saving himself by his own works because he is saved by God's grace. On the other hand, James refuted the idea of salvation by faith only, saying that a person cannot save himself by believing without acting on his belief. Paul did not deny the necessity of faithful works (Romans 1:5; Ephesians 2:10), and James did not deny that we are saved by grace through faith. There is no disagreement.

Therefore, let us pursue salvation according to the prescription of the Bible. Salvation is not obtained by faith only, works only, or grace only, but rather it comes by the complete combination of these factors that comprise the gospel.

Philippians 2:12-13

¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.