

Faith Alone?

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Paul wrote, "...everything that does not come from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23) When one is presented with such an all-encompassing statement as this, we are easily tempted to brush it aside as meaningless or idealistic and unrealistic or to fanatically embrace it as "the whole counsel of God." Neither of these two approaches will help us attain to the will of God for our lives. Rather, we need to recognize that Paul is simply restating in a different way a truth that Jesus taught about Himself.

"This is the work of God," Jesus said, "that you believe in Him whom He sent." (Jn. 6:29) *The* - singular – work that God requires of men who would attach themselves to Him is to believe in Christ Jesus as Savior and King.

Paul also wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; if [the grace the faith, the salvation, all of it) is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Eph. 2:8-9)

On the basis of these kinds of statements in the New Testament, some have gone too far and said things like, "There is no need for faith, prayer, tithes, 'church' attendance, repentance and/or confession. It is finished! Jesus fulfilled *all* faith, *all* of the Law, *all* Bible prophecy, and took *all* of God's anger, wrath and judgment on the Cross. You are *never* separated from God no matter what you do, think or feel." Though there are some elements of truth in view here, as stated, this statement goes far beyond the truths stated in the New Testament.

- "Without faith it is impossible to please God..." (Heb. 11:6)
- "Pray without ceasing..." (1 Ths. 5:17)
- "God now commands all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30)
- "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn. 1:9)
- "Let no one deceive you with empty words...the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Eph. 5:6) And "[Christ] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." (Heb. 5:9)
- "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor. 11:31-32)
- "Depart from Me, you who [in My name] practice lawlessness [what is right in your own eyes]. I never knew you." (Mt. 7:22-23)

It is true that tithes (as practiced in many sects of modern churchianity) are not at all mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. It is true that "church" attendance (as practiced by almost all of modern churchianity) is most often only an abomination to God. It is true that Christ's redemptive work was finished on the cross (Jn. 19:30) – yet Paul also wrote, "I fill up in

my flesh *what is lacking* in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the ekklesia.” (Col. 1:24), indicating that at least something still needs to be done or supplied. It is true that Jesus’ life is the perfect picture of a life lived by faith but that does not relieve us of our responsibility to exercise and use the faith which He gives to us – the parable of the large sum of money given to the three servant teaches that we are to reproduce and increase what the Master gives us or be cast out. (Mt. 25:20-28) It is true that Jesus fulfilled all of the law and the prophets (Mt. 5:17) but we are not thereby entitled to practice sin, of which all lawlessness (that which is right in our own eyes) is sin. (Jdgs. 21:25, 1 Jn. 3:4, Rom. 6:15) It is true that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39) – yet it is equally true that we are warned, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in *departing from* the living God...looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God...lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.” (Heb. 3:12, 12:15-16) Again, while there are elements of truth in view here, the perspective is skewed and twisted and off balance compared to the whole counsel of God.

The reality of our faith in our life is really a simple picture. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar, “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” (Jn. 4:14) Later He cried out during a feast of the Jews, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” (Jn. 7:37-38)

Again, Paul wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that [faith is] not of yourselves; it [the faith, the salvation, the grace, all of it] is the gift of God.” (Eph. 2:8) The living water *is* this gift of God that springs up into eternal life.

It can be categorically stated that everything must come through this faith that God has given us. Yet it is equally true that everything which Christ has given us must come through this faith and out from our lives or else our faith is dead. (see Jas. 2:17)

The works that must proceed through our faith and out from our lives include:

- the good works God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10, also see Tit. 2:14, etc.)
- obedience to righteousness that leads to holiness (without which no one will *see* God) and on to eternal life. (Rom. 6:19, 22, Heb. 12:14, etc.)
- suffering. (Acts 14:22, 1 Pet. 4:1-2, 2 Tim. 2:3, 3:12, etc.)

All of these things must, in their season and time, come through our faith or else we have no living faith. It is that simple.

The entire “faith alone” concept is largely just an over-reaction to legalistic, dead and dry churchianity. It is overly simplistic, unbalanced, skewed and distorted. Salvation by faith is the gift God has so extravagantly and freely given us and there is nothing whatsoever that we can do

to earn or attain to this wondrous, priceless gift – but there is much, indeed it requires great diligence and effort, that we are required to do to *keep* this wonderful gift from God. (Jude 21, 2 Pet. 1:5, Heb. 6:11-12, etc.) Any teaching or “theology” which diverts us from the things which truly are our responsibility before God to do is as deceptive as is that teaching or “theology” which diverts us into taking up activities and behaviors that God never intended us to be involved with. Any faith that is placed upon the things we do (whether consciously or “unconsciously”) as some means whereby we might someday earn or we have somehow already attained to our own salvation is as mistaken and misplaced and deficient as any faith that so relies on “the finished work of Christ” that sins (usually but not always subtle ones) are tolerated, practiced and excused and the righteousness, holiness, obedience and suffering are neglected, abandoned, even ridiculed, ostracized and persecuted. Both of these ways are merely errors of failing to hold truth uprightly.

The way of Christ is still simple: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow *Me*.” (Lk. 9:23)

Christ does not command us to follow teachings, “theologies,” and especially not fallen and fallible men. He commands us to follow *Him!* If we find ourselves pursuing anything that can rightly be called an “it” – even the good things of God (love, grace, peace, fellowship, truth, whatever) – we need to repent and return to following after and pursuing only *Him*. Only when He is the only true object of our deepest desires will we be able to hold the things He gives us with the proper balance and light grip which gives all glory and honor to the God who gave such wonderful gifts to men. Anything other than single-minded devotion to Christ is simply another expression of the lifeless, apostate churchianity from which we have so rightly fled.

Let he who has ears hear.

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