

Saving Faith

Is one saved by faith alone, or by faith and obedience?

Someone who makes a thorough study of God's plan of salvation from sin will be convinced that salvation comes through faith. Paul made this plain by saying, "For by grace are ye saved, through faith: and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). But what is saving faith? Is man passive in regeneration, as some affirm? Does mentally believing in Jesus Christ, and doing nothing else, bring salvation?

Faith Makes Salvation Possible

For an answer to the foregoing vital questions let us read John 1:12: "But as many as received him to them gave he power [literally, the privilege or right] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." According to this verse believing on Christ makes it possible for a person to become a son of God. Such faith alone does not save him; rather it places salvation within his reach. Clearly, if he does not believe on the name of Jesus Christ or in the plan of salvation He has provided, he will not take the steps necessary to be saved.

How Faith Saved Noah

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house... and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Hebrews 11:7). How believed, first of all, that a destructive flood was coming, though he had never seen such. He further believed that if he would be delivered. His faith, then, led him to meet God's conditions, and he was saved.

In like manner, faith saves the sinner. Of course, he must first accept what Christ did for him at Calvary, for upon this expiatory sacrifice the whole plan of salvation is based. But the sinner's faith in what Christ did-his belief in the promise of salvation if and when he meets the terms of the gospel-leads him to obedience, and this obedient faith brings salvation.

How a Jailer Was Saved

Those who affirm that salvation comes through mental faith alone, that the sinner need do nothing but accept Christ and what He did on Calvary, are prone to quote Paul's words to the Philippian jailer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31). The implications is that all the jailer did to be saved was to believe on Jesus Christ. But proponents of this theory fail to quote verse 32, which reads, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord." This "word" certainly included the doctrine of water baptism, for verse 33 states that the jailer and his family were baptized. And, since repentance is to precede water baptism, there is no doubt that they

also repented. Then in verse 34, the jailer received an experience that caused him to rejoice.

How then, did this jailer's faith bring him salvation? It did so by leading him to meet the conditions of the gospel. Faith and obedience worked together, and he was saved.

Confession Must Accompany Faith

Romans 10:9-10 says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The word unto is from the original eis, and means "for the purpose of." According to this passage, there is definite connection between confession and salvation. And confession is an act, over and above simple faith in the mind.

Prayer Must Accompany Faith

Continuing his teaching concerning salvation, Paul said, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). Of course, a person can call upon the Lord from his heart, without physical effort. But the phrase "call upon," usually implies the use of the voice, or vocal prayer. And any use of the voice in prayer is an act, in addition to faith.

To go further, we are taught in God's Word that a person receives the Holy Spirit by faith (Galatians 3:2, 14). But does this gift come through faith without any action? Some affirm that it does, giving as their reason that it is not proper to ask anyone for a gift already promised. But Christ's words disprove this idea. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13).

Faith and Obedience

What part, then, does faith play in receiving salvation? A person must believe in Christ's sacrifice and in the availability of the gift of salvation. His faith must motivate him to obey the scriptural command to repent, be baptized in Jesus' name and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). He must believe that if he will repent and ask in prayer then he will receive the Spirit. His faith leads to obedience and thence to receiving the Spirit and the fulness of salvation.

There is no contradiction between Ephesians 2:8, which says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith," and James 2:24, which declares, "By works a man is justified, and not by faith only." The latter statement is certainly true when "works" means acts of obedience to the terms of the gospel. Only those who have "the obedience of faith" -those who obey the doctrine, obey the gospel, obey Christ-will be saved. (See Romans 6:17 10:16, 16:26; Hebrews 5:9).

Saving faith leads a person to obey the gospel, and such obedient faith brings salvation.

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