

Faith and Works

by Josh Reimer

I. Introduction

- a. One big difference in the religious beliefs that different people hold is the respective roles of faith and works in our salvation.
 1. The faith only side might say you don't have to *do* anything besides accept God.
 2. The other side might say faith is necessary but you also have to be an active Christian. In other words, you have to have faith and works.
- b. You don't have to look very hard to see why there is disagreement.
 1. On the one hand, we have scriptures like Ephesians 2:8+9.
 2. And then on the other hand, we have scriptures like James 2:26, which says: *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*
- c. So how do we balance this out? We know we need faith to be saved, but what about works? Where do those fit in?
- d. That's the subject of this lesson.
 1. First, we will look at what faith is and isn't.
 2. Second, we will look into what faith has to do with our salvation, as compared with works.
 3. Then, we will move over to works and look at how they fit in.
 4. And finally, we'll consider what our works show about us.

II. What faith is and isn't

- a. Hebrews 11:1-3 defines faith
 1. Verse 1 describes it twice. Both times it calls faith the visible part of an invisible thing.
 - A. *Substance* is something tangible, something we can see or touch. So faith is the *substance* of things we hope for - and those are things we can't see yet.
 - B. *Evidence* is also something tangible - it's used for proof, it has to be seen. So faith is also the *evidence* of things we can't see.
 - C. It almost sounds like a contradiction. Faith is what I can see in this thing that I can't see.
 2. So faith needs to be substantial.
 - A. My faith tells me that God created this world (3).
 - B. I can't see how He created it or what He created it with because He did not make it with things which are visible. The means or materials God used are beyond us - we can't see them.
 - C. But we still understand that He did it because of faith - something that we can see.
- b. That doesn't mean that faith is blind or random. There have to be reasons for our faith, and so faith must begin with the external.
 1. Romans 1:20 says: *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.*
 - A. I believe God is real because of all the evidence.
 - B. This world is too complex to be an accident.

- I. As I understand it, theories of evolution would suggest all the things in nature that fit together just right got that way by trial and error. But that just doesn't make sense.
- II. I recently learned that a baby's head is moldable so that it can fit through to be born - how could that have happened by trial and error? If the first generation didn't get that one right, then there wouldn't be a second generation to give it a shot.
- III. There's a bug called the Bombardier beetle that defends itself by shooting this boiling hot chemical out of its body. To do that, it has to mix two different chemicals together and shoot them out. How could that have happened by accident? If the first generation didn't get it right, they probably would have all burned themselves to death and that would be that. And if they didn't develop both chemicals at the same time, then what would be the purpose of either one of them?
- C. Our faith allows us to believe in things we can't yet see - but that doesn't mean our faith comes out of thin air. Nature gives us all the evidence we need that God is real.
- 2. The faith that the Israelites had came from evidence too (Exodus 4:29-31).
 - A. Moses and Aaron brought this message from God and Aaron backed it up with signs from God's power.
 - B. And so the people believed - they believed because they had evidence.
- 3. Evidence is the reason people believed in Jesus too (John 1:45-50).
 - A. Jesus could not have known Philip was under that fig tree by natural means.
 - B. And so Philip knew that Jesus had to be more than just a man.
 - C. I like Jesus' reaction here, too. He kind of said, "is that all it takes? You'll be seeing a lot more evidence than that."
 - D. The same thing could have been said to the Israelites. They believed just from the evidence Aaron gave them. Little did they know, there was a lot more evidence coming up: 10 plagues, the Red Sea being lifted up, Manna appearing out of nowhere, water pouring out of a rock, and the frightening signs of God's glory at Mount Sinai.
- 4. Faith begins with the external - it begins with evidence of God.
- c. But faith in God is more than just believing He exists.
 - 1. Otherwise faith wouldn't just begin with the external, it would also end with the external.
 - 2. The Israelites had all the external evidence anyone could ever want. They well knew that God was real, but still their faith was lacking (Hebrews 3:16-4:2).
 - A. 3:19 says that they couldn't enter in because of unbelief and 4:2 says "the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it."
 - B. So who are these unbelievers?
 - I. Verse 16 identifies them as "all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses."
 - II. These are the very same people who saw Aaron's signs and believed, the very same people who saw amazing miracle after miracle on the way from Egypt to the Promised Land.
 - III. These people knew God existed - they had to believe that. But they failed because of a lack of belief, a lack of faith.
 - C. They didn't have faith - or at least not lasting faith - even though they had all the external evidence they needed.

3. So did King Agrippa (Acts 26:24-28).
 - A. Paul had just talked about people rising from the dead and so the governor, Festus, said he was crazy.
 - B. But Paul said he wasn't crazy - in other words, the idea of people rising from the dead wasn't crazy - and he said that King Agrippa knew that.
 - C. Notice why King Agrippa knew that (26): "none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner."
 - I. Jesus hadn't acted in secret. King Agrippa knew the things He had done.
 - II. Agrippa had all the external evidence he needed, but he still didn't have the faith to accept the truth - at least not at that time.
4. External evidence can make us believe God exists - but that's not enough. James 2:19 says: *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!*
5. Luke 16 records the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.
 - A. In this parable, the rich man dies and is sent to torments. He doesn't want his five brothers to end up there as well, so he asks Abraham if he could send Lazarus back from the dead to give them the message, because surely if a dead person rose up and told them something, they would believe it.
 - B. Abraham's response is in Luke 16:31 and he said: *If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.*
 - C. For some, no matter how much external evidence they get, they aren't going to have faith. There has to be more to faith than the external evidence we take in.
- d. We know that faith is something we can see regarding things we can't see. We know that it begins externally with evidence that makes us believe God is real. But it doesn't end there because there is more to faith than just believing that God exists.

III. Faith for salvation, as opposed to works

- a. We have to be saved through faith because we aren't good enough to be saved by our own works.
 1. The law does a good job of showing us what sinful things are (Romans 7:7, Romans 3:20).
 - A. The law shows us what sin is.
 - B. If I was going to save my own self by my own deeds, I would have to know the law perfectly and keep it perfectly.
 2. The problem is, I'm not good enough to do that - none of us are (Romans 3:21-28).
 - A. We are all sinners - none of us are good enough to save ourselves.
 - B. Fortunately for us, God is willing to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. He sent His Son to pay for our sins and He is willing to forgive us. It's a pretty good deal.
 - C. Look at verse 27. Boasting is excluded. What would we have to boast about? We don't save ourselves, we are saved by God's good graces.
 - D. Look at verse 28. We are justified by faith. God saves those of us who are faithful to Him - and remember, that means more than just believing He exists.
 3. The best thing that the law does for us is that it shows us we are sinners who need to be saved. But the law doesn't save us. Acts 13:39 says: *by Him (Jesus) everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

- b. We are saved, not by our faith, but through our faith (Ephesians 2:4-9).
 - 1. Verse 8 says we are saved through faith - so there's the faith part of our salvation.
 - 2. Now what about the works part?
 - A. Verse 9 says, "*not* of works."
 - B. The end of verse 8 says this "is the gift of God."
 - C. Throughout these verses, it talks about grace and mercy.
 - D. We aren't saved by any works that we do. It's God's grace, God's gift - not anything we earn.
- c. 2 Timothy 1:9 says that God "*has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.*"
- d. How does faith relate to our salvation? Our faith in itself doesn't save us but God saves the faithful. Faith is a requirement.
- e. How do works relate to our salvation? They don't. God saves the faithful. We can't do a thing to save ourselves because we are all sinners. We need God to do it for us.

IV. Where do works fit into my salvation?

- a. The scriptures tell us pretty clearly that we are saved by God's grace and it is our faith that gets us into God's grace. We are saved *by grace through* faith.
- b. So what about works? What do works have to do with anything?
- c. To answer this question, let's start by looking at at something Jesus said that wasn't really directly related (Matthew 7:15-20).
 - 1. Jesus starts here by talking about a specific thing - false prophets. How do you tell whether someone is a false prophet? You can tell by their fruits; you can tell by the things they produce or accomplish.
 - 2. Jesus started out being specific about false prophets, but then he moved to more general terms. This test doesn't just work on false prophets.
 - A. Good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit.
 - B. A bad tree (like a false prophet) is going to bear bad fruit - that's how we know he's a false prophet.
 - C. And a good tree (like a faithful Christian) is going to bear good fruit - that's how we know he's a faithful Christian.
- d. When John the Baptist was preaching his message and the Pharisees and Sadducees came out, he didn't say, "hey guys, thanks for stopping by."
 - 1. What he said in Matthew 3:7+8 was: *Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance.*
 - 2. Just showing up didn't make them repentant. And they couldn't just think repentant thoughts. They had to *bear fruits* worthy of repentance.
 - 3. John knew that actions are what show a person's true attitude.
- e. We can tell whether a person is a false prophet by his actions. We can tell whether a person is repentant by his actions. We can tell whether a person loves God by his actions.
 - 1. In John 14:21, Jesus said: *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.*
 - 2. 1 John 2:3-5 says: *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word,*

truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him

- f. And we can tell whether a person is faithful by his actions.
1. If you read Hebrews 11, you see many examples of this.
 - A. By faith, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice (Hebrews 11:4).
 - B. By faith, Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his household (Hebrews 11:7).
 - C. By faith, Abraham offered up Isaac (Hebrews 11:17).
 - D. By faith, Moses chose rather to suffer affliction than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25).
 2. James puts it plainly for us in James 2:17: *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*
- g. The question was, where do works fit into my salvation?
1. And the answer is, they don't. Works are not a component of salvation like faith is. They are an *indicator* of faith.
 2. We don't need faith *and* works. We just need real faith. If there is real faith, then the works will come naturally.
 - A. If there is no good fruit, then it's not really a good tree.
 - B. If there are no works, then that person is not really faithful.
 3. If I am really faithful, then that can't help but shine through in my life. My actions - my works - will show my faith.

V. What should faithful actions show?

- a. We saw early on in the lesson that faith is more than just believing God exists. It is also believing He will reward us (Hebrews 11:6).
1. If I am faithful, then I don't just believe that God exists.
 2. I believe that He created me.
 3. I believe that He is gracious enough to send His Son to pay for my sins.
 4. I believe that He is merciful enough to forgive me of my sins.
 5. I believe that, not only did He prepare a reward for me, but he also paid off my debts for me so I can have that reward.
- b. So what should faithful actions show? How about gratitude.
1. I won't do good works just because I'm trying to fill my good works quota so they'll let me into Heaven. I think that is the mindset that brings about so many issues and questions regarding gray areas.
 - A. Do I need to worship God Sunday and Wednesday or is just Sunday good enough?
 - B. Do I really need to go to bible studies and study my bible at home?
 - C. Is it okay to drink a little, so long as I don't get drunk?
 - D. Do I really need to share the gospel with others?
 - E. I'm okay as long as I do more work than that guy, right?
 2. We shouldn't be trying to figure out what the minimum level of effort or commitment is. That is a works for salvation mindset.
 3. I will do good works because that's what God wants me to do and because I love Him. And I owe Him. And He knows what's best for me.
- c. Works are an indicator of faith. Let's each of us ask ourselves, what are my works indicating?

1. If my works are lacking, then maybe it doesn't mean I need to focus on working harder.
2. Instead, maybe it means I need to focus harder on my faith. If I can truly wrap my head around all the amazing things God has done for me, then how could I not try and do God's will to the best of my ability?
3. God has done so much for us. Let's do all we can for Him.