

Faith Alone or Faith That Works?



One of the greatest enemies of true faith is “mental assent.” Nowhere before Reformed theology became so popular was it ever taught that ‘faith alone’ was all one needed when discussing the matter of salvation. Instead of positive judgment based on righteous character as seen throughout the Old and New Testament, Reformed teaching has managed to separate the two. They have managed to deceive the masses into believing that final salvation does not depend upon human ‘*strength, merits, or works,*’ but is solely based on ‘faith alone,’ which the Scriptures never gives this idea.

The Reformed doctrinal confession about faith is defined as *believing in* and *trusting in* Christ alone and what he achieved for salvation. It states,

“the principle acts of saving faith are *accepting, receiving, and resting* upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life.” (Westminster Confession of 1646 AD, Article XIV, section II)

So according to Reformed teaching, it does not matter what your conduct is after you have made a *mental assent* and *confession* (rather than by “moral transformation”) since Christ accomplished it all for you, without any effort on your part, because there is nothing you can do to get salvation and nothing you can do to lose it; a teaching you will never find in the Scriptures. So what does all this mean?

1. That a person should never believe that they have the ability to live in a way that would please God by simply making the right choices in life; that human effort has no place when it comes to a positive judgment in the end.
2. That it is all a matter of *believing in* and *trusting in* Christ alone, faith alone, and no effort is required on your part.

What Reformed teaching has done is develop a contrast or counter-position between ‘faith’ and ‘human effort’. This concept of “faith” as taught in Reformed teaching is in complete opposition of what the New Testament writers meant by the word.

In the Bible we never see where faith was the opposite of human effort.

In the Scriptures when the Greek noun (*pistis*) is used, it generally means *faithfulness*. When we read ‘faith’ towards Christ, it means *faithfulness to* him, not just a mental assent. When it comes to ‘believing in’ Christ (when the verb form *pisteuo* is used), this generally means *being faithful to* him. As you can see, their use of the term required *loyalty, obedience, and perseverance* and *all implies human effort*. The early believers did not see a contrast between faith and human effort.

To the early believers, having 'faith' meant being faithful by human effort to live by Jesus' teachings. They were committed to his example. They did not see it as "*I can't do anything good until Jesus does it in me.*" 'Faith' to them meant **obeying** the teachings of Christ, striving to live as he instructed. They knew they must remain *loyal* to Jesus and *persevering* in the way of life that Jesus taught. So the believers we read about in Scriptures knew *faith* had to do with living rightly and being faithful to Christ as one and the same. The teaching of Reformed theology, by making a contrast between faith and human effort, has radically departed from what the Scriptures actually teach and reveal about faith.

It is pointed out that the New Testament uses *pistos* 67 times, describing both Jesus and God as faithful (Mark 11:22; Rom. 3:3; 1 Cor. 1:9, 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18; Eph. 6:23; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 2:13b; Heb. 2:17, 3:2, 12:2; James 2:1; Rev 1:5, 3:14, 14:12, 19:11) as well as faithfulness when it is directed towards people. Paul talks about 'faithful' Abraham (Gal. 3:9), and contrasted the unfaithfulness of people with God's faithfulness. Paul said he and Timothy remained faithful to Jesus and had Timothy instruct 'faithful' men who in turn would teach others. (2 Tim. 2:2) We have the "good and *faithful*" servant in one of the parables. (Matt. 25:21, 23) The good and faithful servant is contrasted to the 'wicked servant'. Jesus groups the wicked servant with the unfaithful. (Luke 12:46)

Obedience and *pistis* are used as if they are synonymous. The word '**obedience**' is a synonym for *pistis*. A '*faithful servant*' is seen as an '*obedient*' servant. There are passages of Scripture that speaks of **obeying the gospel** and of people *faithfully following* it (Acts 5:32; 2 Thess.1:8; 1 Peter 4:17 cf. Mark 1:15; Gal. 3:2). In John 3:36 we read,

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

So *pistis* is synonymous with obedience and the opposite of disobedience. And if you were to read Heb. 3:18-19, you will find the connection of disobedience with the lack of faith (*pistis*). Peter and John use the word interchangeably with obedience and contrast it with disobedience. (1 Peter 2:7-8; 1 John 3:11, 22:24).

No one is saved by 'faith alone'. Anyone can believe, even the devils (James 2:19), but only those who **obey** are in Christ. (1 Sam 15:22; Acts 5:32; Heb. 5:9)

The Biblical facts are that **faith is synonymous with obedience**. That's right, **DEEDS** are linked with faith. Why? Because real faith is a work! It is a work of righteousness. It is *obedience to the truth* (1 Peter 1:22). Salvation is a reality, not a mental assent. Devils believe and acknowledge God exists (James 2:19), because anyone can *believe*, but only those who OBEY are in Christ (Acts 5:22; Heb. 5:9). It is a faith that works by love (Gal. 5:6) and purifies the heart (Acts 15:9) by being obedient (1 Peter 1:22).

Believe in the Greek is 'Pisteuo'. It is translated as "*Fully persuaded, firmly confident, having strong conviction, and steadfast endurance.*" It is impossible to have all of the above and not be obedient to God. It requires being faithful to God. Jesus says those who **do** the Father's will are

the ones who inherit eternal life. Reformed theology says it's simply a matter of '*believing*' and '*trusting*' rather than *believe and obey*.

Faith does involve assent to God's truth (1 Thess. 2:13), but it doesn't stop there, it is also accompanied by obedience (Rom. 1:5, 16:26) which is a *faith that worketh* by love (Gal. 5:6).

Faith is not just something that happens or a onetime experience (Phil. 2:12), it is a life-long process and we must be careful because Scripture is filled with dire warnings to aid genuine believers along the narrow way, and if we ignore them we can return to our wallowing in the mire (2 Pe. 2:18-20), become deceived and fall away (1 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pe. 3:17), get entangled in worldly lust and forfeit salvation through acts of sin (Matt. 13:21; Lk. 8:13; Jn. 6:66; Ro. 6:23; 8:13; 1 Co. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:2-4; 2 Pe. 2:20-22; 1 Jn. 2:15-16), forget that we were cleansed from old sins (2 Pe. 1:9), turn aside to idle talk (1 Tim. 1:6), fail to make our calling and election sure (2 Pe. 1:10), become disqualified (2 Co. 13:5), castaway (1 Co. 9:27), reprobate (Ro. 1:28; Titus. 1:16), cease to do good in patience continuance, grow weary and lose hope (Ro. 2:7-8; Gal. 6:7-9; 2 Pe. 1:3-11), become devoured by the roaring lion (1 Pe. 5:8-9), turn grace into a license for immorality (Jude 4), be duped by the spirit of error (1 Jn. 4:6), suffer shipwreck (1 Tim. 1:18-20), fail to abide in Christ and consequently be cut off by God, be cast forth as a branch, wither, be thrown into the fire and burned. (Jn. 15:1-6; Ro. 11:22). Those who remain faithful to the end will receive final salvation. (1 Peter 1:9).

It is a lie of the devil to try and make you think works don't mean anything. Jesus says it does (Matthew 25:31-46). People are going to be rewarded and punished, for they will be held accountable for how they lived.

A lot of people at this point will probably cry out, "You are teaching that one must work for salvation!" They will immediately point out Eph. 2:8-9, failing to mention verse 10, and ignoring the fact that Paul was speaking against adherence to the Mosaic Law. He is speaking about the rituals of the Torah where salvation is not by observing festivals, new moons, physical circumcision, sabbaths, food and drink, etc..

To deny that works are essential to salvation is to deny the Scriptures and thus deny the very words of Christ, which Reformed theology does! Jesus preached a gospel of works, done together with God by faith (2 Cor. 6:1; Titus 2:11-1.2). Listen to what Jesus says,

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Luke 13:24

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Matt. 7:21

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:" Matt. 7:24

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he **will keep my words**: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” John 14:23

“If ye **keep my commandments**, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” John 15:10

“Go and sin no more.” John 5:14, 8:11

Do you really think moral behavior has nothing to do with the outcome of the judgment to come? Paul never advocated a ‘Do nothing salvation’. Paul said God

“ will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation ” (Rom. 2:6-8).

Paul preached the same message as Jesus. In John chapter 5 Jesus says,

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.” (vs. 28-29)

Many have been led to believe that deeds will not determine the outcome of their salvation. They have been trained to be Biblically illiterate and have come to loath the commands of Scripture. All through Scripture we see that faith and deeds are synonymous, otherwise all one has is the same kind of faith the devils have, but at least they **tremble**. (James 2:19)

Many times in the New Testament, the way ‘faith’ (pistis) is used is associated with the idea of remaining loyal. Those who follow Jesus have faith. It’s faith in action, faithfulness. Having ‘faith’ (pistis) is linked with having good moral sense (1 Tim. 1:19). The opposite of ‘faith’ (pistis) is opposing what is right. Those who do not have faith are the ones with a corrupt sense of morality and show it by their disobedience to God. Those who exercise godliness are characterized with having faith.

Can man save himself simply by doing good deeds? A person becomes spiritually dead because of his own trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and though a person living in sin can do **some** good deeds, he is still dead. But God can make alive, quicken us (which we cannot do ourselves), but this only happens through **repentance** and **faith** proven by deeds (Acts 26:18, Matt. 3:8, 2Cor. 7:10-11). It is only after the clearing of wrong doing and vehement desire can God quicken us, but he will never quicken a person who remains in their sins.

Let us remain faithful until the end where we will receive the goal of our faithfulness, the salvation of our soul. (1 Peter 1:9)