

Are we saved by

Faith or Works



In the year of 1974, in the town of Terah, a proud mother gave birth to two beautiful baby girls, but the joy and thrill of motherhood was eclipsed by the awful dread of the condition. In pain and anguish, the onlookers viewed as the babies entered into this world joined at the head. Siamese twins, Ladan and Laleh, continued on in this condition into adulthood. At the age of twenty nine, the two unanimously agreed that their future happiness and well-being depended upon a separation.

On June 5, 2003, Keith Goh, the head neurosurgeon was assisted by 28 doctors and 100 medical assistants from across the globe as they embarked on a grueling 72 hour operation to separate the twins. The operation was intense, but finally the separation was made. As the doctors sought to reconstruct the separate brains, the twins suffered excessive blood loss and both died soon after. The operating room was devastated and the world was in tears over the loss, yet still today many Christians are doing the same thing.

Many Christians today are trying to separate what God has joined to the detriment

of their eternal salvation. This dangerous operation that many church leaders are trying to make in separating faith from works is leading many souls to eternal death. Today may Christians try to cut away any mention of works of obedience from our salvation. As a result, many have an obscured view of salvation, thinking they will gain eternal life while they are actually on the way to hell.

Saved by Faith or Works

While many are fast to quote Paul's statement, "A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28), we like to evade James addition, "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (Jas. 2:28). While many are fast to affirm that we are saved by faith, they distort the meaning of what salvation through faith by ignoring the words of James. Without the explanation of James, we have a distorted view of the gospel.

You see, James addition to Paul's statement helps us understand the truth about the gospel. When James tells us that we are saved by works, he adds that we are not saved

"by faith only." This implies that we are saved by faith and works. This is not anyone's interpretation. That is simply what James says in the Bible. Very clearly. So how do we make sense of this? It's simple really when we understand what James is actually saying and yet sadly, most Christians are not getting it.

Faith Works

James says that we are saved by faith and works because James understands that faith and works cannot survive without each other any more than Ladan and Laleh could survive separate. James says, "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas. 2:17). Dead faith. At the same time, works by themselves, if they do not have faith, are "dead works" (Heb. 9:14). This is all James was saying. Faith and works are both needed.

Faith and works are like two sides of the same coin. Would you say, "I want to use the front of my coin to pay for one thing, but the back of my coin to pay for something in another store." Of course not. The coin cannot be separated. Faith and works cannot separate

them any more than you could separate Ladan and Laleh. Without faith your works are nothing. Without works, your faith means nothing. So those who think they don't have to obey God once they are saved are deceived.

Faith Obeys

You can believe in God all you want, but if you don't have works your belief is useless. You must have enough faith in God to obey Him. In spite of this, many Christians think they are on their way to heaven while they continue in sin and when Jesus returns, many who claim to be Christians will approach Him only to hear the words, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:22).

The words, "those who practice lawlessness," refers to those who do not obey the law of God, the Ten Commandments. While many Christians claim that after we are saved we no longer have to worry about keeping the Ten Commandments, this is a gross distortion of the gospel. The Bible is clear that those who believe in God must obey

as evidence of their faith, while those who do not strive to constantly obey God by keeping His Ten Commandments will not make it to heaven.

Obedience of Faith

True faith obeys God's law. While it is impossible to obey the Ten Commandments on our own, "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). Those who have faith that God can forgive their sins, but do not have faith that God can help them resist and overcome sin will not make it to heaven. The gospel involves more than forgiveness. We are called "for obedience to the faith" (Rom. 16:26).

The reason James says faith must have works is because God supplies His power to true faith. In practical terms, that means that when God's word tells us not to lie or use His name as a cuss word or get drunk or have sex outside of marriage or look at pornography, those who believe in God pray, "Please give me the power to obey." Knowing that it is too hard to obey without God, they make the effort anyway, by faith, trusting that Jesus

will supply the power to help them obey. This is what true faith is all about.

Conclusion

Trying to separate faith and works is like trying to separate a light bulb from an electric current. Like the separation of Ladan and Laleh, when we separate faith from works, the two can no longer survive. In order to be complete, they must co-exist. God has joined faith and works. When people try to separate them, simply reply, "What God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt. 19:6).

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