

WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?

Without exception, every church that considers itself Christian, whether Protestant or Catholic, and a good many of the cults all have one thing in common. They all require faith as a requirement for salvation or eternal life.

Where they differ from one another, however, is with what additional requirements they add. Among the list of additional requirements are the following:

- Turn from sin
- Water baptism
- Commitment of one's life
- Confession of sin
- Regular church attendance
- Praying
- Living a good life
- Doing your best
- Keeping the 10 Commandments
- Trying to obey the Golden Rule
- Tithing, or giving money to the church
- Good works
- Holy Communion
- Confirmation
- Penances

There are those who teach that faith is simply a part of the formula and others teach that it is faith only. Among those that teach that faith is the only requirement, however, there are many who still teach what I call a works message, as they say that if the faith does not produce good works, it cannot be saving faith!

Perhaps you have heard this one. Some teach that there are those who will miss heaven by 18 inches. This, they explain, is because they have only believed with their head and not with their heart. (They estimate the distance from the heart to the brain to be approximately 18 inches.)

There are those who teach that saving faith is not something that anyone can have but it must be given by God, which they say is exactly what He

does for those whom He has chosen to be saved. Thus, when a person believes, it is not because he chose to believe but because God chose him to believe and gave him that faith. Thus, the invitations of scripture are not really invitations at all but simply statements about those to whom God elects to be saved. They, of course, cannot teach that God loves everyone, nor that Jesus died for everyone.

Thus, there are many questions about the faith that saves. Some of them are:

- Is faith the only requirement, or is it simply one of many?
- Is faith a gift from God, given only to the chosen, or is "believing" something that anyone can do?
- Does man have two believers (head and heart) or one?
- Will a person with saving faith produce good works automatically?
- What must a person believe for his faith to be a "saving faith?"
- How much faith, or what kind of faith, is required for it to qualify as "saving faith?"

Now, let's examine these in some detail.

IS FAITH THE ONLY REQUIREMENT, OR IS IT SIMPLY ONE OF MANY?

While it is true that all the items in the first column list are included, in part or in whole, on religious organization's lists of requirements, it is also true that none of them are given by Jesus as additional requirements. He spoke clearly on the topic numerous times and the only requirement He gave us was to "believe" in Him, or in His name. If there is more to it than that, these verses cannot mean what they say. Any addition to these would be to take away what Jesus gave.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be

*saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **

(John 3:16-18)

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (John 5:24)

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. (John 11:25-26)

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. (John 6:47)

Think about it. If any of the things on the list in the first column are also required, these quotes by Jesus are lies.

Notice these next passages by the apostle Paul.

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

(Acts 13:38-39)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

(Ephesians 2:8 & 9)

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

(Romans 4:5)

And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

(Romans 11:6)

Yes, those verses clearly teach that salvation is by faith, and not by works. Works, no matter how good, cannot save, or help save, anyone! Yet, most religions require them for salvation.

IS FAITH A GIFT FROM GOD, GIVEN ONLY TO THE CHOSEN, OR IS "BELIEVING" SOMETHING THAT ANYONE CAN DO?

Faith is not the gift of God; salvation is. God commands and requires unbelievers to repent (change their mind from unbelief to belief) and when they do, He gives them a new birth. (See John 1:12.) God's invitation is to all.

DOES MAN HAVE TWO BELIEVERS (HEAD AND HEART) OR ONE?

The answer should be clear; man has only one believer. The heart is merely a blood-pumping organ. The Greek word translated "believe" means "to trust," "rely upon," or "place confidence in," and not to simply accept something as being true. Thus, to "believe with the heart" means to "rely upon" and not merely to agree that facts are true.

WILL A PERSON WITH SAVING FAITH PRODUCE GOOD WORKS AUTOMATICALLY?

Many say the answer is "Yes." The scriptures, on the other hand, paint a different picture. A close examination of 2 Peter 1:5-9 says that we need to be diligent to add to our faith certain qualities; otherwise we will be unproductive.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Certainly, Paul's letter to the church at Corinth shows that the believers there were not only unproductive but were quite carnal. Obviously, their faith was not producing good works.

WHAT MUST A PERSON BELIEVE FOR HIS FAITH TO BE SAVING FAITH?

Numerous times we are told to believe in Jesus or to "believe in His name." To believe in His name is to believe that He will do what His name implies He will do. His name means, "God who saves, keeps, and defends." Another definition is, "God, our savior." Thus, to believe in His name means to believe He is God, your savior. It is not simply to believe He is a savior, but your savior! Notice what Jesus said in John 8:24, speaking to those who denied His deity.

"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." The word "He" was added by the translators. Jesus was claiming to be the great "I AM" that spoke to Moses from the bush.

HOW MUCH FAITH, OR WHAT KIND OF FAITH, MUST A PERSON HAVE FOR IT TO QUALIFY AS SAVING FAITH?

Let's remember that faith is not the savior; Jesus is. Faith is simply the hand that lays hold of the savior. God recognizes even the tiniest bit of faith and provides salvation. The "key" is that it must be a faith that believes God "will" save. This implies that the true believer will have assurance, at least at the point of initially believing.

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

(1 John 5:13)

*(NOTE: All quoted scripture is from the New King James Version of the Bible, published by Thomas Nelson Publishers)
(Scripture emphases mine.)

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4/26/2011

Almost nobody would argue against faith being required for salvation but there is much disagreement over what constitutes saving faith.