

# Faith and Works

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Are men saved by faith or works? Roman Catholicism offers salvation based on works of merit. In 1517, Martin Luther rebelled against Catholicism specifically over the sale of indulgences (i.e., permits) to sin, but more generally, over the broader “salvation by meritorious works” approach of the Catholic church. His opposition to that unscriptural system caused him to swing to the opposite extreme and father the doctrine of “salvation by faith only.” Most of the Protestant world continues to be influenced by this position, holding that one is saved the moment he believes in Christ, apart from any other conditions.

Both Catholics and Protestants need to re-read their New Testaments on this and many other subjects. **Man is saved neither by works alone nor by faith alone.** That which avails for salvation in Christ is “**faith working** through love” (Gal. 5:6, *emph, DM*). All attempts to earn salvation without faith in Christ, are useless (Eph. 2:8–9). Likewise, any attempt to be saved by faith apart from works is futile because “by works a man is justified, and not only by faith” (Jam. 2:24). If the Scriptures teach that men are not saved by “works,” but that they are also saved by “works,” it seems obvious that two different kinds of “works” are being discussed. No fewer than four different kinds of works are discussed in the New Testament, and these must be recognized if we are to understand the Lord’s terms of our pardon.

- **Evil Works.** Such are mentioned often (John 7:7; Rom. 13:3, etc.). Evil works condemn rather than save (Rom. 2:9), so they obviously are not the works to which James refers.
- **Works of the Law of Moses.** These could not save because no man could perfectly keep the Law (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20, etc.).
- **Works of Merit.** No man can ever live a good enough life or do enough good works to earn or merit salvation (2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). James was not discussing works of merit.
- **Works of Obedient Faith.** These are the works of which Paul spoke in Galatians 5:6—“faith working through love.” The Hebrews writer uses Abraham to illustrate the harmony of obedient works, born of faith; he was saved because of his faith that caused him to obey God (11:8–10). He was saved by works of obedience which he did because of his faith (Jam. 2:21–23).

Faith does surely save, but only when it is an obedient faith. When one does what the Lord commands in order to be saved, he is doing “works.” Such works are not our works or works of merit, but God’s works. The Lord stated that even faith itself is such a “work” (John 6:29). Likewise, confession of one’s faith in Christ (Mat. 10:32–33; Rom. 10:1–10), repentance of sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30), and baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21), are all commands of

Christ “unto” (leading to) salvation. When one obeys them (including the command to believe), he is not doing meritorious works, but the works of God which save. It is such works that James describes: “by works a man is justified, and not only by faith.” If one can be justified without such works, he can be justified without obeying Christ – a totally absurd concept for one who believes the Bible at all.

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