

Not By Faith Alone

Many people are relying on a dead faith and don't know it! Is your faith dead — of no worth whatsoever? Here's how to find out.

By Leroy Neff

One early Protestant theologian taught, "The just shall live by faith *alone*." Because of this widespread belief, many people have falsely concluded that all Christians must do is have faith or belief in God — and that faith alone will save them.

"Just believing"

This approach to Christianity of "just believing," without any action, has influenced many to live right on in their sins, without any real change in their lives. They have wrongly thought that living a Christian life is "just as easy as falling off a log" or that even "fools" can receive the reward of the saved, without changing their ways — if they just believe in Christ.

Just believing in or having faith in Christ is not enough. There are two opposite kinds of faith — *living* faith, and *dead* faith. Satan and his demons also believe in Christ. They know Christ is real, but that faith or belief will never save them! "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder" (Jas. 2:19, New International Version).

The Protestant leader added one word to the Bible text, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38 as quoted from Hab. 2:4). He inserted the word *alone* at the end of this clause, entirely changing the God-inspired meaning.

The Christian must have faith — faith that is the gift of God, not something you work up yourself (Eph. 2:8) — but he must have more than faith alone. He must show that he has faith by what he does. "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works,

and I by my works will show you my faith" (Jas 2:17-18, Revised Standard Version).

It is no wonder that because of such clear contradictions of the famed theologian's theory, he would brand James' letter "an epistle of straw." James does not agree with this man's "theory of straw" — the mistaken idea asserting that faith alone is all that God expects of His servants.

James closes his comments on this subject by stating, "**So faith without works is dead also**" (verse 26).

How are we justified?

Some of Paul's writings appear to conflict with the statements of James. James said Abraham was "justified by works" (Jas. 2:21). Paul says that we are "justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1). Does Paul disagree with James? The same Paul, in the same chapter, tells us that we are "justified by His blood" (verse 9). Why these three apparent contradictions — or are they really contradictions after all?

There is one rule of Bible study that should help clear this up. Remember the rule is that you *add* instead of *subtract* when putting the scriptures together. One scripture does not contradict another; rather, it adds to or further clarifies what the other scripture says. This will be evident when we read another statement from James.

"You see that a man is justified by works and *not by faith alone*" (Jas. 2:24, RSV). This should make it clear that the Christian must have works and faith (and this verse diametrically opposes the Protestant theologian's misguided assumption). Putting this together with Romans 5:9, it should be clear that a third ingredient for justification is also

necessary, and that is to have the "blood" (sacrifice of Christ) also.

So a person is not justified by faith alone, any more than he is justified by works alone or by the blood of Christ alone. He is justified *by all three*.

Here is how the three fit together: A person whom God is calling must have faith in God, and ask for forgiveness of his past sins — that Christ's faith will be in him. Then, he must show his works by repenting and being baptized. Then God will apply the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Christ's blood) to atone for or cover his sins. That is how a person is justified — made just — or forgiven of past sins.

No need for works?

Is this all that is required of a Christian? No! Justification is just the beginning. He must continue in faith, he must continue in *good works* and he must continue to have his sins covered.

One who believes in faith alone, without having good works, has a *dead faith* — not a living, saving faith. We show by our *good works* that we have living faith. When God tells us by His Word to do a particular thing or to refrain from doing a particular thing, we show that we believe Him or do not believe Him by our actions.

It is obvious from many scriptures that a Christian must have good works.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may *see your good works* and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16, RSV). This positive statement shows clearly that He expects His disciples to have *good works* that can be seen by the world — by the unconverted people. Such works are not

just nice thoughts or feelings that a person may have in his heart or mind.

Actually, everyone, including unconverted people, have works of one kind or another. A profitable servant of Christ will have good works that will endure the test of fire (I Cor. 3:13-15). An evil person, or an unconverted person, produces the "works of the flesh" as Paul makes clear in Galatians 5:19-21, where he lists 17 bad "works" of sin.

Some professing Christians, even ministers, deny the Christ they claim to worship by their works. Notice Titus 1:16, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

In other words, they "believe on Christ" (that is, that He *exists*) but they do not *believe Christ* (that is, what He *says*, teaches or commands).

Titus reveals the nature of these evil works in verses 10-15; they include deception, false teaching, lying and teaching fables and commandments of men. The faithful Christian, on the other hand, should be just the opposite; he should be "zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14).

Just what are good works?

What are these "good works" a Christian should have? James gives three examples. Let's examine them briefly so that we might better understand what James was talking about when he spoke of works with faith.

The first example concerns a Christian who sees one of his brethren without proper food or clothing: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" (Jas. 2:15-16, NIV)

If we have our needs supplied and then refuse to share them with a brother or sister who is lacking in even the minimum necessities of life, we do not have the right kind of works to go with our faith. We then have dead faith.

The second example that James gives is that of Abraham when he

offered Isaac (verses 21-23). There are several other instances in the life of Abraham that show this same trait, but this particular trial was undoubtedly the most difficult of Abraham's life. No matter what God asked Abraham to do, he did it. There is no record of disagreement — no argument, no back talk. He obeyed all of God's commandments and laws (Gen. 26:5).

It is rare today for even some members of God's Church to do just what God asks them to do in His Word without a little "bucking," complaining, arguing or backbiting.

In carrying out God's Work in this

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time, we are sometimes asked by Church leaders to perform some task, but we drag our feet or bring up all kinds of reasons why we shouldn't do it or why someone else should do it. Abraham was not that way. He just simply and quickly did what he was asked to do. In plain words, Abraham obeyed God. That showed that he had living, not dead, faith.

From Abraham's example, it should be evident that obedience to God and His laws and His instructions are "works" that must accompany faith.

The third example James gives relates to Rahab and her receiving and protecting the Israelite spies when Israel was about to cross the Jordan River into Canaan.

"And in the same way was not also

Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" (Jas. 2:25, RSV)

Notice the points James mentions. She 1) received the messengers and 2) sent them out another way. James does not mention Rahab's sinful past, nor the fact that she told a lie, which violated God's law. She surely repented of those deeds, and they were not held against her. James emphasizes the positive acts that she performed for God's servants of that day, even at the peril of her own life.

She guarded the messengers God's servant Joshua had sent on an important mission. She received them with respect and offered whatever protection she could. Then she gave them instructions on how they could best avoid the enemy and possible death on their return home.

This is an example of a person who respected God's representatives when they were on a physical mission. Today the servants sent from God have a much more important spiritual mission.

As a result of Rahab's "works" she and her family were saved from physical death and were able to receive the promise to Israel of physical inheritance in the land of Canaan. This is an ancient type of real salvation and inheritance in God's Kingdom as a result of having real faith and works.

We need living faith

These three examples should enlighten us as to the kind of works we should have along with faith. Works give our faith life.

We are *saved* by the life of Christ (Rom. 5:10) — not by our works — and are given salvation as a free gift from God. But we are rewarded, or given our particular responsibility in God's Kingdom, according to our works. "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

Everyone has either good or bad works. As Christians we need to be sure that our works are good. Faith, along with good works, is a living faith, and that is the kind of faith we all need. □