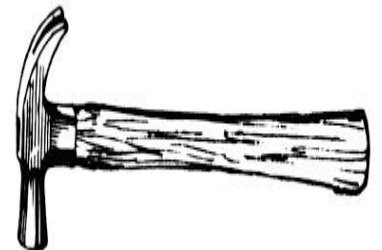




What are  
Faith & Works  
In the New Testament?

A Contextual Study of the New Testament Teaching of Salvation

Including quotes by Martin Luther and over 100 Scripture references



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## INTRODUCTION

There is an age-old debate in Christian doctrine – faith and works. When talking to one person or another on any side of the debate, they will quote one or more passages that support their position. Then other side will do the same.

How do we arrive at truth of a doctrine in Scripture?

Many people will quote, incorrectly, that we interpret Scripture “by” Scripture. **We should actually interpret Scripture “with” Scripture. Otherwise, the understanding that allows all Scripture to be in harmony is the right one.**

With that in mind, this booklet will start out discussing three common passages in the context of their own verse and book. Other passages by the same author about the same subject are then included, and finally the rest of the New Testament as it relates.

This allows a more thorough discussion of each passage of Scripture treated in their context, as they should be. Any “difficulty” is resolved by accepting the understanding that allows all Scripture to be in harmony, instead of one Scripture “overriding” another, which is what is commonly practiced.

Then, over a hundred other related Scripture passages in this discussion are put in the context of recent history and the theologians that created the relatively-recent faith and works debate.

Finally, quotes and Scripture references are given to show what Scripture taught originally, and the recent developments and confusion brought late into the discussion that persist to this day.

As with any study, this one is imperfect and always a work in progress. The reader is encouraged to study his or her Bible diligently, keeping an open mind, seeking the truth wherever it may lead. Truth is never found in a debate; it is only, ever found by an individual putting themselves in the hands of God, His Word, and submitting to His truth.

**PASSAGE #1: Ephesians 2:8-9** – “<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and<sup>[h]</sup> that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

FACTS ABOUT PASSAGE:

**Written by?** Paul | **Written to whom?** Christians at Ephesus

**Salvation elements mentioned *in these verses*:** faith

**Other salvation elements mentioned *in that same book*:** baptism (4:5)

**Salvation elements NOT mentioned in that same book:** repentance, confession, perseverance (faithfulness)

**Questions begged:** Is Ephesians 2:8-9 a complete formula for salvation without repentance? Confession? Faithfulness/Perseverance?

**In Context (same chapter):** vs. 10 – “created in Christ Jesus *for* good works”

**In Context (same book):** 4:5 – “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”

**In Context (same author):** Romans 6:3 - “...all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death”

**In Context (same author):** Galatians 3:27 – “...all of you who have been baptized with Christ have put on Christ”

**In Context (New Testament):** James 2:24 – “man is justified by works and not by faith alone”

**In Context (New Testament):** Acts 2:38 – “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit”

**Conclusion:** Ephesians 2:8-9 is written *to Christians*, not unbelievers, and even if one makes the argument that this verse is written for unbelievers, no one can say the formula for salvation is complete under anyone’s understanding. No, this verse must be understood in the context of its same book, same author, and the rest of the New Testament. Only then we understand that this verse, when speaking of “through faith”, implies more than basic belief, but rather the entire New Testament concept of obedience to God.

**PASSAGE #2: Romans 10:9-11, 13** – “<sup>9</sup> [e] that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;<sup>10</sup> for with the heart a person believes, [f] resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, [g] resulting in salvation. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE [h] DISAPPOINTED” [Quoting Isaiah 45:17] <sup>13</sup> for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” [Quoting Joel 2:32]

**FACTS ABOUT PASSAGE:**

**Written by:** Paul | **Written to whom?** Christians in Rome

**Salvation elements mentioned *in these verses*:** confession, belief

**Other salvation elements mentioned *in that same book*:** repentance (2:4), baptism (6:3-4, twice in those two verses), faithfulness (2:7, 5:3-4 (twice in those two verses), 8:25, 15:4-5 (twice in those two verses))

**Salvation elements NOT mentioned in that same book:** none (Romans as a whole gives us a complete picture of salvation – i.e., “the Romans Road”)

**In Context** (same chapter): vs. 17 – “faith comes by hearing”

**In Context** (same book): 2:4 – “... the kindness of God leads you to repentance.” 2:7 – “...who by perseverance in doing good...” 5:3+4 – “knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance...” And, “...and perseverance, proven character...” 6:3+4 – “...baptized into his death.” And, “buried with Him through baptism into death...” 8:25 – “...with perseverance we eagerly await...” 15:4-5 – “...through perseverance...we might have hope...” And, “...perseverance and encouragement...”

**In Context** (same author): Acts 22:16 – “...be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” (Luke is recording Paul’s testimony of his own conversion, defining for us here what “calling on His name” means)

**Conclusion:** Romans 10:9-11, 13 is written *to Christians*. Paul also discusses repentance, baptism, and faithfulness in this same book. All are commands, required of the believer, to be saved. In effect, “the Romans road” has more than one “stop” unto salvation.

**PASSAGE #3: John 3:16** – “For God so loved the world, that He gave His <sup>[a]</sup>only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

**FACTS ABOUT PASSAGE:**

**Written by:** John | **Written to whom?** Anybody anywhere

**Salvation elements mentioned *in these verses*:** belief/faith

**Other salvation elements mentioned *in that same book*:** confession (6:69), baptism (3:5, 22, 26, 4:1-2), faithfulness/obedience (3:36)

**Salvation elements NOT mentioned in that same book:** repentance

**Questions begged:** Is John 3:16 a complete formula for salvation without repentance? Nobody would argue repentance is “optional.”

**In Context (same chapter/book):** vs. 5 – “unless one is born of water...” vs. 22 – “His [Jesus] disciples... baptizing...” vs. 26 “...was baptizing...” 4:1 – “Jesus’ [disciples] were... baptizing...” 4:2 – “...baptizing... His disciples were...”

**In Context (same author in 1 John):** 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful... to forgive us our sins...” 2:23 – “one who confesses the Son has the Father also.” 2:23 – “every spirit that confesses... is from God...” 4:15 – “Whoever confesses... God abides in him.” 5:6 – “...by water and blood...”

**In Context (New Testament):** Acts 16:31-33 – “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved...”, “they spoke the Word of the Lord...”, “immediately... baptized, he and all his household.”

**In Context (New Testament):** James 2:19 – “Even the demons believe... and shudder.”

**Conclusion:** John 3:16, in context, is proof that faith is more than intellectual assent. John records Jesus’ command to baptize, His disciples baptizing, and that saving faith includes other elements such as confession. Acts 16 shows that faith is explained in the speaking “of the Word of the Lord”, which involves baptism. James confirms for us that belief alone does not do a bit of good for demons, or us. Saving faith is an obedient faith.

## **PASSAGES THAT SAY, “NOT BY WORKS... BY FAITH...”**

Examples: Romans 3:28-30, 4:5, 11:6, Galatians 2:16, 3:5-6

### **A SHORT HISTORY:**

Since the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the doctrine of “faith alone” has been incredibly common in churches in the Western world. It is so ingrained in most people’s religiosity that to suggest anybody is saved by anything but “faith alone” is usually met with immediate hostility. It will surprise the reader that this doctrine is new, alien to the New Testament, and not even taught by its original authors like it is today. “Faith alone” has taken on a life of its own, and requires a sensitive but proper rebuke.

**FIRST**, let us start with the **ONLY** verse in the Bible where the phrase **“faith alone”** appears: James 2:24, “You see that a man is saved by works and NOT [emphasis mine] by faith alone.” So, we can see there is an immediate problem with embracing “faith only” as New Testament doctrine.

**SECOND**, when the New Testament mentions “works”, what is it speaking of? And when the New Testament mentions, “faith” what is it speaking of?

**WHAT ARE “WORKS”?** – **FIRST** mention in the New Testament of “works” is Matthew 5:16 – “...that they may see your good works...” So Jesus commands us to do good works, and even so far as to make sure other men “see” them.

**JESUS & THE REQUIREMENT TO DO “WORKS”** - John 9:4 says, “We must work the works of Him [God]...” → We **MUST** work the works of God. This tells us immediately there **ARE** works we **MUST** do. What are those works we must do? John 14:21 says, “He who... keeps my commandments... is the one who loves me...” John 15:10 says, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love...” So the things that Jesus commanded we **MUST** do. **DID** Jesus command faith? Yes – John 3:16. **DID** Jesus command repentance? Yes – Matt. 4:17. **Did** Jesus command confession? Yes – Matt. 16:15-17. **Did** Jesus command baptism? Yes – Matt. 28:19 & Mark 16:16. **Did** Jesus command faithfulness? Yes – John 14:21, Matt. 28:20, among others. If Jesus commands it, it is not optional!

**PAUL & “WORKS”** in Romans – 3:20, 28 – “works of the law”. In Galatians – 2:16 – “works of the law” (three times in one verse!), 3:2, 5, 10 – “works of the law” – **\*\*\*Paul emphasizes repeatedly in Romans and Galatians that the “works” that do not save are the works of the Mosaic Law.\*\*\*** Obviously, if Christ and Paul do not contradict, there is a “works of the Law” and a “works of obedience to Christ” that are very different – one condemns (“the ministration of death” – 2 Cor. 3:7), the other saves!

**JAMES & “WORKS”** - James 2:20 – “faith without works [obviously not works of the law, but of Christ] is useless.” 2:22 – “...as a result of the works, faith was perfected.” 2:24 – “...man is justified by works and not faith alone.” 2:26 – “faith without works is dead.”

**MARTIN LUTHER REJECTED THE BOOK OF JAMES FROM THE BIBLE AND ADDED THE WORD “ALONE” TO ROMANS 3:28:** “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works <sup>[s]</sup>of the Law.”

Ironically, this same verse proves that the works Paul was referring to was “works of the law”, just as it was, not “works” entirely. Paul is speaking of “works of the law”, where as James is talking about obedience to Christ. Martin Luther rejected the book of James because he could not harmonize Paul and James – whereas the very verse he modified is the one that harmonizes these two inspired Biblical authors! If our theology does not match Scripture, do we reject Scripture, or our theology?

**YET, MARTIN LUTHER ACCEPTED BAPTISM AS ESSENTIAL AND CALLED IT A WORK OF GOD, NOT MAN:**

He did not see “faith alone” in contradiction with the “works of God in Christ” required by Jesus and His Apostles – something his successors failed to do, as can be seen by **Luther’s own words as recorded in Martin Luther’s catechism, published in 1530, part four, “of baptism”:**

**“Thus faith clings to the water, and believes that it is Baptism, in which there is pure salvation and life;”,**



**“Hence it follows that whoever rejects Baptism rejects the Word of God, faith, and Christ, who directs us thither and binds us to Baptism”,**

**“Baptism, however, is not our work, but God's; baptism gives the forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the Devil, gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, just as God's words and promises declare”,**

**“Water doesn't make these things happen, of course. It is God's Word, which is with and in the water. Because, without God's Word, the water is plain water and not baptism. But with God's Word it is a Baptism, a grace-filled water of life, a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul said to Titus in the third chapter: Through this bath of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that we, justified by the same grace are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying”,**

**“St. Paul says to the Romans in chapter six: ``We are buried with Christ through Baptism into death, so that, in the same way Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, thus also must we walk in a new life”, among endless other quotes.**

**It was Luther's followers who took his added “alone” to faith and rejected all of the works of God in Christ that are essential (John 9:4), Luther's (and Scripture's) understanding of baptism, and replaced it with unfounded man-made theology.**

**The “faith only” theologians today, naturally in great number, unanimously reject Luther's understanding of the theology he founded! Luther did great things, but stumbled greatly by adding “alone” to Romans 3:28 (not found in any Greek manuscript, by his own admission), causing centuries of confusion.**



## WHY DID LUTHER AND HIS SUCCESSORS ADD AND KEEP “ALONE” IN ROMANS 3:28 AND IN THEIR THEOLOGY?

Although it is hard (and improper) to devise any one person’s original motivations, it is easy to see where Protestantism in general gets most of its theology – **“whatever is opposite to Catholicism”**. There was deep hate between Catholics and Protestants of all varieties for centuries – wars were fought, boundaries redrawn, and geopolitical upheaval was the norm for a long time during the time these two belief systems battled for dominance. To this day, conservative Protestants of all varieties main “beef” with Catholicism is a flawed understanding of works in religion (unfortunately, both sides have flawed perspectives).

Catholicism, at its logical core, believes that constant contact with the literal body and blood of Christ in the daily Eucharist may be necessary to obtain salvation. It also teaches Catholic-baptism (including infant baptism, and by the “mode” prescribed by the priest, typically sprinkling) is necessary for entrance into “the one and only true Catholic church.” Nowadays, of course, there are many Catholics who no longer believe in the exclusivity of Catholicism, the infallibility of the pope, the rulings of the Vatican councils, etc. However, for the vast majority of the church’s existence, and even today, the Catholic Church’s official stance is that it is the one true church, and salvation is only found in it, via its leadership with the Pope, his cardinals, and church council, by the catechism, through the daily Eucharist.

Protestantism did not so much “go back to the Bible” as much as it simply took anything opposite of Catholicism it could: whereas in Catholicism the Eucharist is daily and necessary, Protestant communion is whenever and only symbolic; in Catholic tradition, baptism (including infants) is by the priest in the mode he prescribes as essential to entering “the one and only true Catholic church”, whereas Protestantism teaches that baptism is unnecessary and only an outward sign. Catholics practice closed communion; Protestantism practices open communion. The clergy in the Catholic Church are priests; there are “pastors” or “reverends” in Protestant churches.

The Catholic Church is “free will” in nature; out of Protestantism came John Calvin’s Presbyterianism, which embraced Augustine’s 6<sup>th</sup> century, long-rejected “salvation by election”, later deemed “Calvinism.” Baptist churches today are from a Presbyterian origin, thus the adoption of part (or more recently, all) of Calvin’s theology. This is the origin of “once saved, always saved”, the fifth and most common tenet of Calvinism.

Martin Luther’s original theology had a sincere first attempt to go back to the Bible, and was on track in many areas (as you can tell from above), but his successors ran away with his “faith alone” addition in Romans 3:28, as you read above, and never got back on track (this is the danger in “adding” to Scripture! See Revelation 22:18+19).

The differences go on and on but the point is clear – Protestantism does not find its roots in the Bible as much as it does in the centuries-old wars that defined doctrine not so much on the Bible, but on whatever the opposite of Catholicism was.

However, from those centuries of war, around 1793, a clear call came to go “back to the Bible” (Revelation 18:4), away from both Roman Catholicism and its reactionary-daughter churches. The independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ were born. It would take several decades to truly iron out both Catholic and Protestant prejudices, and today, we can see some these now-seen-as-traditional-views actually returning and invading our Back-to-the-Bible churches. This paper is written in partial reaction to this trend, in an effort to stay “pure” in Scripture and not revert to previous error.

We will not gain from adopting Scriptural error or compromise; denominations and Catholicism are now both **dying**; we gain nothing, even numerically, from adopting either of their beliefs or practices. “Trust in God; trust also in me [Jesus]” (John 14:1) should be our rallying cry to stick to God’s Word! Our founder is Jesus Christ, His Apostles teach us through “their Word” (John 17:20), and all of God’s Word is sufficient for all faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16).

## WHAT IS “FAITH” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

“Faith” is the Greek word, “pistis”, which means “faith and faithfulness.” In Greek, there is no divorce between a faith that “believes” and a faith that “works”. Only in recent times, with modern languages (from the 15<sup>th</sup> century on), do we have a linguistic and theological difference between the two. In the New Testament – and in the Greek – there is no difference! A believing faith is always an obedient, “working” faith!

HEBREWS 11 lists 11 (ironically) specific heroes of “faith” who always obeyed: “Abel offered...”, “Noah prepared...”, “Abraham obeyed” (mentioned twice), “Moses...endured...kept...”, “Rahab welcomed...”, “Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah... David, Samuel... the prophets... conquered... performed... shut... quenched... escaped... put...”

ROMANS 1:17 quotes HABAKKUK 2:4 that says, “the righteous will live by faith” – showing that in the Old AND New Testaments, that faith means obedience – nobody argues that obedience to the law was not required in Israel. All the same, obedience to Christ is required in the New Testament.

## MORE VERSES THAT SHOW FAITH AND OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST ARE INSEPARABLE:

Acts 6:7 – “a great many... were becoming obedient to the faith.” Acts 14:22 – “...continue in the faith”, Rom. 1:5 – “the obedience of faith...” Rom 3:27 - “law of faith”, Rom. 16:26 - “obedience of faith”, 2 Cor. 5:7 – “walk by faith”, 2 Cor. 8:7, “in faith...abound in this righteous work”, Gal 2:20 – “live by faith”, Gal. 3:11, “live by faith”, Gal. 5:6, “faith working”, Gal. 6:10, “do good... by faith”, Eph. 6:16 – “taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish...”, Col. 1:23 – “continue in the faith”, 1 Thess. 1:3 – “work of faith”, 2 Thess. 1:7 – “work of faith”, 1 Tim. 1:19 – “keeping faith”, 1 Tim. 2:15 – “continue in faith”, 1 Tim. 3:13 – “served well... in the faith”, 1 Tim. 5:8 – “does not provide... has denied the faith”, 1 Tim. 6:12 – “the good fight of faith”, 2 Tim. 2:22 – “pursue... faith”, 2 Tim. 4:7 – “kept the faith”, Heb. 6:11-12 – “same diligence... not be

sluggish, but be imitators of those who through faith...”, Heb. 10:22 – “full assurance of faith... our bodies washed with pure water...”, Heb. 10:38 – “live by faith”, Heb. 11:3 – “by faith... the worlds were prepared...”, Jam. 1:3 – “faith produces endurance”, 1 Pet. 1:7 – “your faith...tested by fire”, 1 Pet. 5:9 – “resist him [the devil]... in your faith”, 2 Pet. 1:5 – “applying all diligence, in your faith supply...”, 1 John 5:4 – “whatever is born of God overcomes the world... our faith”, Jude 1:3 – “contend... for the faith”, Jude 1:20 – “...building yourselves up on your most holy faith”, Rev. 2:13 – “did not deny My faith...”, Rev. 2:19 – “I know your faith...that your deeds of late are greater...”, Rev. 13:10 – “the perseverance and the faith”, Rev. 14:12 – “who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”

### **EVERY EXAMPLE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS OF CONVERSION INCLUDES STEPS BEYOND “FAITH”:**

Acts 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 16, and 22 all include baptism – some include faith and repentance and confession and faithfulness – but nobody denies those things are important! All the same, God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34, Rom. 2:11), and since He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), we can safely assume He has always expected obedience to His commands unto saving faith – and still does!

### CONCLUSION

Jesus requires us to do works, even so much that they are visible by men (Matt. 5:16). He repeats that we must do the works of God (John 9:4). We know we are not under the Law of Moses any longer (Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:20, 27+28; Gal. 2:16, 3:2, 5, 10). **“Works of Law” and “Works of God in Christ” are separate ideas: the works of the law do not save, but the works of God in Christ do!** They are a far lesser burden on us (Matt. 11:30), given to us by grace (Eph. 2:8+9), for the saving of our souls (Acts 14:22, James 1:21, 1 Pet. 1:9, etc.).

**This view lets us harmonize Jesus, Peter** (Acts 2:38 – command to repent and be baptized), **Paul, and James** – this is essential if we are going to have a unified, harmonized, Scriptural understanding of God’s Word, the ultimate goal of our study.