



2. Faith and Works

The man sat alone in a tower, deep in thought. By the flickering light of a candle he read the words over and over again, scarcely able to believe the wonderful news that they contained.

All of Martin Luther's life, he had been taught that there was no such thing as a sure and certain path to heaven. From an early age, he learned that the only way a person might be saved was to live a pious life and do as many good works as possible. However, after spending years as a monk fasting, praying, and trying to follow God's Law, Luther felt no closer to God than when he had begun. He knew God demanded perfection, and he knew he was nowhere close. He had begun to despair.

*But now, as he read passages from Romans and Psalms, Luther discovered a teaching which filled him with hope. "No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the Law. . . and yet, **righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe!**" The good news of Jesus been covered up by the church for centuries, but Luther found it in the place where it had always been: the pages of Holy Scripture.*

Years later, Luther would write about this night, "Now I felt exactly as though I had been born again, and I believed that I had entered Paradise through widely opened doors." Luther's "Tower Experience" was not an emotional moment of "giving his life to Christ". . . rather, it was the realization that by grace, God had given Christ's life to him. There was a sure and certain path to heaven, after all.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

In our last lesson we learned what God says about **sin** and **grace**. Today we will turn our attention to two related concepts: **faith** given through the Holy Spirit, and **works** done out of love for Jesus.

WHY ARE SOME SAVED AND NOT OTHERS?

1 John 2:2 *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Jesus provided enough forgiveness for everyone in the world to be saved. However. . .

John 3:16 *whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Mark 16:16*whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

The difference between those who are saved and those who are condemned has to do with something the Bible calls **faith**. Let's talk about what faith is, and what it isn't.

James 2:19 *You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.*

Romans 10:10 *It is with your heart that you believe.*

Psalms 78:22 *They did not believe in God or **trust** in his deliverance.*

Faith is more than “head-knowledge.” We might call it “heart-knowledge.” If I have faith, that means I don't just know that Jesus died to save the whole world – I also **trust** that Jesus died to save **me**.

Does the strength of our faith save us? Or does the object of our faith (Jesus Christ and his righteousness) save us?

Illustration: Snakebite

WHERE DOES FAITH COME FROM?

Ephesians 2:8 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

1 Corinthians 12:3 *No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 10:17 *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Faith doesn't come from _____

Faith does come from _____, through _____.

Psalms 65:3-4 (King David writing) *When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts!*

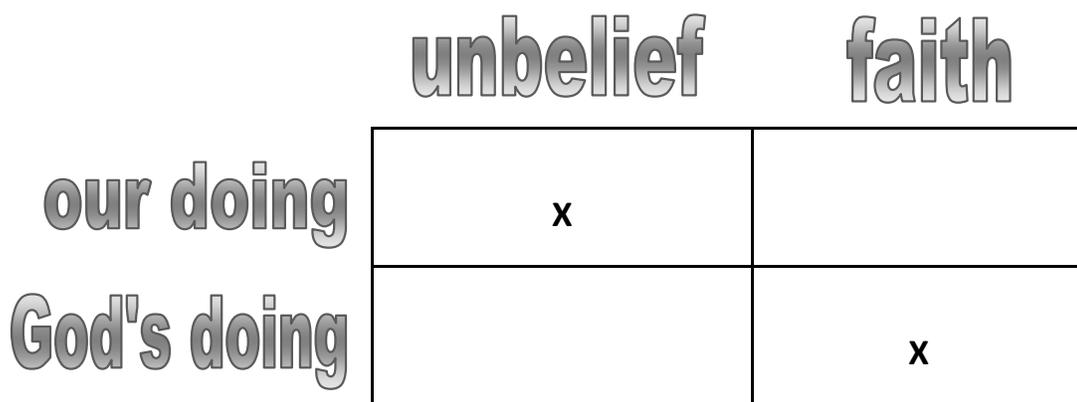
John 15:16a (Jesus talking w/ disciples) *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.*

Thessalonians 2:13,14 (Paul writing to Christians) *From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Many Christians believe they “chose” or “decided” to come to faith. Yet from Old Testament times all the way to New Testament times, what is the only choosing the Bible speaks of in this matter?

Why must God be the one to choose us, and not the other way around?

Discuss the following diagram, especially the blank boxes. Why is this teaching so difficult for us to grasp?



Think carefully before answering. . . . are human beings born with free will?

THE ROLE OF GOOD WORKS

Ephesians 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Romans 11:6 *And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*

Galatians 5:4 *You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*

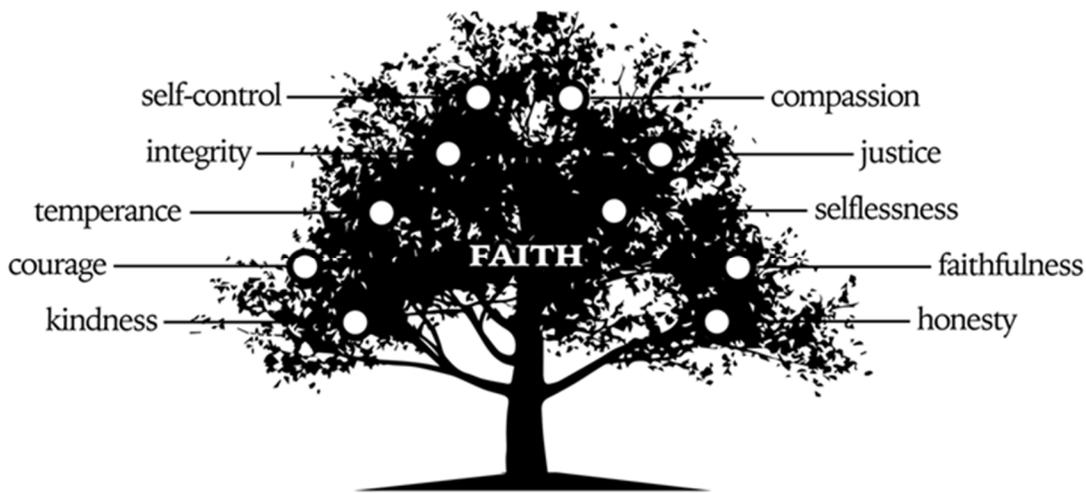
What percentage of our salvation depends on God's grace? What percentage of our salvation depends on our own good works?

Some have asked the question, "If good works don't save us, then why would we ever do them?" God's Word provides a number of answers. . . .

1 John 4:19 *We love because he first loved us.*

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

Galatians 5:22 *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*



Why is the picture of fruit growing from a tree a helpful way to describe the role of good works in the life of a Christian?

Note the following verses on where the power for doing good works comes from:

Philippians 2:13 *It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

John 15:4-5 *No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

Where does our ability to do good works come from?

We said that God gets all the credit for the forgiveness of our sins. We said that God gets all the credit for our faith. Would we say the same thing about our good works?

Taking it Deeper

Respond:

“So let me get this straight. . . you’re saying that if a person goes to hell, it’s all their fault, but if a person goes to heaven, all the credit goes to God?”

Agree or Disagree:

Jesus paid for the sins of those people who are in hell.

A good pastor will bring many people to faith.

You can’t live a perfectly holy life until you become a Christian.

Once saved, always saved.

Discuss:

You can say that a person who trusts in Buddha, Allah, or Vishnu has faith. You could even say that they have strong faith. But if you say that, how are you defining faith? Would you say that this person has “saving faith?”

How can my faith in Jesus be strengthened?

How Does Christ Come to Live in You?

Many people are surprised to learn that God actually says Christ lives inside them! (Gal. 2:20). They are often even more surprised that Christ comes to live in them—not by their own personal decision or effort—but only through His Word. As Jesus said, “You did not choose Me but **I chose you**, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit” (Jn. 15:16). Use this chart to see what different churches say about relying either on your own human effort or on God’s Word for Christ to come and live in you.

CHURCH BODY	HOW DOES CHRIST COME INTO YOU?	WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?
LUTHERAN	Five hundred years ago, facing persecution and even death, the first Lutheran Christians confessed: “For the apostle Peter [2 Pet. 1:4] testifies clearly that even we, in whom Christ dwells only by grace, become ‘participants in the divine nature’ in Christ because of this great mystery” (<i>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, VIII:34</i>).	On the basis of the Scriptures, the first Lutheran Christians stated that Jesus Christ does not dwell in you <i>by your choice or your action of inviting Him in</i> . Rather, He dwells in you only “by grace . . . through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). In His Word, God teaches these things so that you know that Christ living in you “does not depend on the man who wills . . . but on God who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16, see also 1 Cor. 1:30). When you, by your own effort, try to have Christ live in you, you have no assurance that you have done enough. When God does everything, you can be sure that Christ lives in you. That’s the difference it makes.
BAPTIST, HOLINESS BODIES, PENTECOSTALS, AND CHARISMATICS	These groups reject the Biblical teaching that Jesus is united to the sinner by God’s miracle of Baptism (as our Lord explains in Rom. 6:3ff.). In the official document, <i>The Baptist Faith and Message</i> , they claim: “Salvation . . . is offered freely to all who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior” (Art. IV). In other words, Baptists, Pentecostals, and holiness bodies emphasize what they mistakenly believe man must do to get Jesus into his heart. These groups also use Jn. 1:12 to emphasize man’s free will to accept Jesus—ignoring verse 13—which denies man <i>any</i> role in inviting Christ to come into his heart.	If you believe Jesus comes into and remains in your heart as a result of “decisions” or “invitations” you make , then your salvation depends on you, rather than on Christ. If you believe that you are the one who invites Jesus into your heart, you can never be sure that you are united with Him.
ROMAN CATHOLIC	The Roman Church says: “We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of Jesus’ life and His mysteries and often to beg Him to perfect and realize them in us and in His whole Church . . .” (<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church, #521</i>).	According to Roman Catholicism, you must “accomplish” Christ’s life in yourself through your own efforts. Then, after you have accomplished this task, you must ask Jesus to finish and perfect the work that you started . This, according to Rome, is a life-long process . However, when St. Paul proclaims “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), he also says that “in Him you have been made complete ” (Col. 2:10). God’s promise of Christ in you is a life-long, certain promise .
ORTHODOX	The Orthodox say: “Christian spiritual life depends on the conscious choice of the ‘way of life.’ To ‘choose life’ and to walk in the ‘way of life’ is the way that man shows himself to be in the image and likeness of God” (Hopko, Thomas. <i>The Orthodox Faith</i> , vol. IV).	According to the Orthodox, you must “choose life” in order that Christ may live in you. Jesus, however, contradicts this teaching when He says, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you ” (Jn. 15:16).