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Can We Be Saved By "Faith Alone": An Open Letter to Dr. Fuller (Revival Hour), and Dr. Meier (Lutheran Hour)

D. A. Sommer

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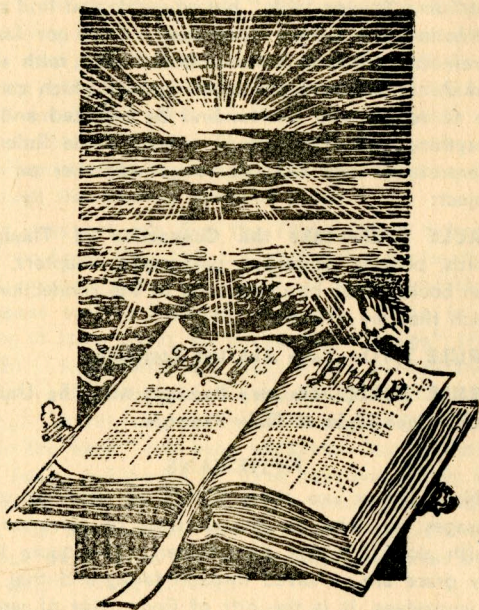
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Can We Be Saved By "Faith Alone"?



"The Word * * * shall judge"—(John 12:48)

*An Open Letter to Dr. Fuller (Revival
Hour), and Dr. Meier (Luth-
eran Hour)*

DEAR "DOCTORS"—

I admire very much the boldness with which you at times denounce popular sins of the day. But I can not harmonize your doctrine that the alien sinner can be saved from his past sins by merely believing, or trusting, in God, without obeying fully what Christ says is necessary to obtain the remission of sins.

Those who believe as you do, speak about "historic faith" and "saving faith," but where do you find such distinction in the New Testament? Does not James merely call it "faith without works" and faith with works? Is not faith the motive power which causes one to repent and confess and be baptized and do everything else commanded? Maybe some Rules of Interpretation will help us to get together on this subject:

RULE ONE—Take the Connection of Thought. Words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and even books, must be understood in the connection in which they are written.

RULE TWO—Take ALL the Testimony.

RULE THREE—Obscure Passages Must be Understood in the Light of Plain Passages.

EPHESIANS

Now, let us use these RULES in studying some passages you cite for the doctrine of salvation by "faith alone," to the alien sinner. You quote this: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2: 8, 9.)

Is not the theme of the whole Ephesian letter, that the Jewish Law is abolished, that Jew and Gentile can now "sit together in Christ," that this "mystery," hid for ages and now made known to apostles and prophets, is that "the Gentiles should be fellowheirs,

and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3: 6, 7)?

It was through the grace, or favor, of God in his Great Plan, that this salvation was by faith and not by works of the Jewish Law. RULE ONE says that we should study the connection of thought, and the connection here is that we are not now saved by works of the Jewish Law, but by faith of the gospel.

Then, applying RULE THREE which says that obscure passages should be understood by plain passages, we refer to Titus 3: 5, which says: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done [independent of the gospel] but according to his mercy he **saved us**, by the washing of regeneration [baptism] and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (hearing the words of the Spirit and believing and thus being begotten by the Spirit).

ROMANS

You have quoted Romans 10:13, to show that we are justified by faith alone, which says "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved." Here again we refer to RULE ONE which says we must take the connection of thought. The key to Romans is 1: 16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto **salvation** to every one that believeth; to the **Jew** first, and **also to the Greek**" (Gentile).

Paul shows that the Gentiles were under sin (1: 18-32); that Jews also were under sin (2: to 3:20); that both Jews and Gentiles are saved from this sin "by faith" apart from works of the Jewish Law (3: 21 to 4: 25); that Jews were rejected from being "children of God" because they sought it by "the flesh" and "works of the law"; while the Gentiles are accepted as "children of God" because they sought it by faith of the gospel (Ch. 9).

Then summing up his reasoning, Paul shows that Jews and Gentiles are alike saved by the gospel independent of the Jewish Law: "For the scripture saith, **Whosoever** believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For **there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek**, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For **whosoever** shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Ch. 10: 11-13.)

Now the "connection" shows that Paul was not talking of merely calling on God, but of **general turning** to the Lord by either Jew or Gentile. These Romans did not enter fully into the "new life" until they had been "buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in **newness of life**" (Rom. 6: 4).

In Romans, Paul was not contrasting faith under the gospel with works under the gospel, but **faith under the gospel with works under the Law**, either the Jewish Law or laws of men.

RULE TWO—TAKE ALL THE TESTIMONY

Notice **all** the conversions in Acts of Apostles and sum them up. If salvation to the alien sinner is by faith alone, because Paul merely said to the Philipian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16), then he did not have to repent, for nothing is said about repentance. But if faith implies repentance, then does it not also imply other works of obedience such as baptism? And the "connection" shows that the jailer "took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and **was baptized**, he and all his **straightway**" (Vs 33)—not six months later. We must take the "connection" and "all the testimony."

Jesus said: "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16: 15, 16). What right has any man to say, He that believeth and is saved, shall be baptized if he wants to, but it is not necessary to salvation?

On the day of Pentecost Peter preached through the Spirit to the people, and convicted them of crucifying the Son of God, "and when they **heard this**, they were **pricked in their heart**, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2: 37.) Notice that it was not the Holy Spirit coming down directly from heaven which pricked their hearts, but the Holy Spirit working **through the inspired words** of Peter.

It does not say that the Pentecostians believed, but we know they did; but that did not give them the remission of their sins, for Peter commanded them, "**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, **for the remission of sins**" (Acts 2:38). Repentance and baptism are manifestations of faith. In Acts 8:26-40, the Ethiopian eunuch did not go "on his way rejoicing," till he had gone down "into the water" and been baptized. Saul of Tarsus saw Jesus, and prayed for three days and nights, but obviously that did not bring the remission of sins to him, for the preacher said to him, "And now why tarriest thou? arise and **be baptized, and wash away thy sins.**" (Acts 22: 16.)

Faith and obedience are joined together much as a locomotive and cars of a train. The cars by themselves have no power to move. It is the engine which has the power which moves the train. Repentance, confession, baptism, and works in general are coaches pulled by faith. But the engine of faith by itself pulls nothing, for James says that "faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2: 26).

Faith implies obedience. You are sick and have faith in a noted physician, and call him; but it takes more than mere faith in this doctor to save you physically—you **must take the medicine, you must obey his word.** Mere faith in Christ, the Great Physician, will not save you—you **must take** the medicine he gives you—you **must obey** Him; you must "repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins," if you hope to be cleansed from them.

MARTIN LUTHER ON FAITH AND BAPTISM

Luther was the first one to teach the doctrine of "justification by faith **alone.**" But his teaching is obviously misunderstood or misrepresented by many today, who teach that when the alien sinner merely believes, he is **that instant** saved from his past sins, without baptism. Luther was combating **works** such as vigils, fasts, pilgrimages, purchased masses, indulgences, and others not in the Bible, as a means of obtaining forgiveness of sins. Here are a few quotations from Luther on Baptism:

"Now, the first thing in baptism to be considered is the divine promise, which says, 'He that believeth **and is baptized shall be saved.**' But we must so consider it as to exercise our faith therein and **no wise doubt** that we are **saved when we are baptized.** . . . Ascribe both to God alone, and look upon the person administering it [baptism] as the instrument in God's hands, by which the Lord sitting in heaven **thrusts you under the water with his own hands,** and speaking by the mouth of his minister promises you, on earth with a human voice, **the forgiveness of your sins.** . . . Thus Paul expounds it in Romans 6, 'We are **buried** together with Christ **by baptism** into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in **newness of life.**' This death and resurrection we call the **new creation and regeneration and spiritual birth.**

Hence it is correct to say that baptism is a **washing from sins**. . . . For this reason I would have the candidates for baptism **completely immersed in the water**, as the Word says and as the sacrament signifies . . . **thus it was also doubtless instituted by Christ.**"—(Luther on "The Sacrament of Baptism.")

HOW ALL "CHRISTIANS" CAN BE UNITED

and not sacrifice any truth

In addition to the truth presented thus far in this tract, if we all would simply call ourselves "Christians" (Acts 11:26), and collectively, the "Church of God" (1 Cor. 1: 2), or "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16: 16; Matt. 16: 18)—we would be closer together; but wearing names of men or peculiar doctrines of church government, etc., causes divisions.

We can be united on "laying by in store as God hath prospered us" (1 Cor. 16:2); but we can not unite on suppers and shows, etc., to raise money, nor on assessments which help drive the poor away.

We can agree on having a plurality of elders (called also bishops) to feed, oversee and rule the flock, for that is in 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1; Acts 20:28; but we disagree on a one-man preacher-pastor to do the feeding which elders and others under them are commanded to do. (2 Tim. 2: 2; 1 Cor. 14: 26; 1 Thess. 4: 11.)

We can all scripturally unite our voices in "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19); but instrumental music in Christian worship was not used for hundreds of years.

The early Christians, individually and collectively, did missionary work (Acts 8: 4; Phil. 4: 15-17); aid work (Acts 9: 36-43; 1 Cor. 16: 1-3); Bible teaching work (Acts 18: 26; 2 Tim. 2: 2); and we can unite on their example; but we disagree on **human organizations** of missionary societies, aid societies,

orphan homes (run by churches), seminaries and Bible schools and colleges, established by **Christians** to do that work of the Church. Paul says, "There is **one** body," "the Church," (Eph. 4: 4; Col. 1: 18). He also says, "Unto God be glory **in the Church** (Eph. 3; 21), not in some **human** religious organization.

We are united on a plurality of elders (bishops) and deacons "in every church" (Acts 14: 23; Phil. 1: 1; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1—this being the only church government in the New Testament besides the inspired apostles, no higher-ups); but we disagree on the human practice of having a **plurality** of churches for **every** bishop. That turns the divine system upside down. True, we have a liberty in Christ; but this does not consist in making new laws and practices, but only in **details** which God has **not** given of **commands** which He **has** given; and these details must be in harmony with the rest of the New Testament.

To be united, we must all give up, not any truth, but **only our HUMAN religious doctrines**; but it seems we are too proud to do this. How saddening, for "If any man shall add unto these things, God will add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev. 22: 18); and, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15: 9).

Note—This tract is 100 for \$1.50, to help circulate free to thousands. If interested in this scriptural Unity, address name below, or D. A. Sommer, 918 Congress Ave., Indianapolis 8, Ind.