

The Inconsistency of “Faith Only”

I'm sure most are familiar with the denominational doctrine of salvation by faith only. In principle, it is the notion that one need not do anything to be saved other than believe that Jesus died for his or her sins. Nothing else is required. Just believe that and your sins are washed away.

Of course such teaching is entirely without sanction of Sacred Scripture. While the Bible does indeed teach that we are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), it does not teach that we are saved by faith only. In addition, God's Word teaches that there are other contributors to salvation (i.e., repentance – Luke 13:3,5; confession – Romans 10:9,10; immersion - I Peter 3:21).

This article focuses on the inconsistency of those who adhere to the faith only tenet. Basically, they don't believe what they teach. To “only believe” in something would be to merely provide mental assent. Nothing else whatsoever would be necessary in order to achieve the desired goal of salvation from sins. Now here's where the inconsistency begins with these false teachers.

Practically every one who teaches this doctrine exhorts those who “accept Jesus into their heart” to pray the “sinner's prayer.” It can vary (as does every doctrine that has originated in the mind of men), but essentially it goes something like this: “Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I believe You died for my sins so I could be forgiven. I receive You as my Lord and savior. Thank You for coming into my life. Amen.” The inconsistency lies in the fact that saying the prayer is an addition to faith. If faith only is mere mental assent (and it is), then adding a prayer that needs to be said is more than faith only. Thus, one is saved by faith and the sinner's prayer. That's not faith only. The irony here is that the faith only adherents charge those of us in the Lord's church with teaching salvation by works because we rightly teach that one must do something in order to be saved. At least when we teach this we're giving Bible authority for those acts that one must do. The “faith only” folks cannot find their “sinner's prayer” anywhere within the pages of God's Word.

Another inconsistency is that in order to have “faith only” one would need to read the Bible. How else could one “believe You (Jesus) died for my sins so I could be forgiven”? There's a bit of a sticky point here because, technically, whether they admit it or not, denominationalists are Calvinists. Calvinism teaches that the Lord gives you this faith without you having to do anything for it. He just gives it to you because He has predestined you to be saved. I call this a sticky point because I don't think most people in denominations know they're Calvinists. They think they've gotten their faith because they've read the Bible. Of course, it is true that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17), but since that is true then it shows that mere mental assent is not enough to be saved. One must actively hear God's Word. Press someone who believes in faith only on this point and see if they'll admit to being a Calvinist. Then press further and help them understand that in so being, they accept all five points of Calvin's doctrine (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints).

Yet another inconsistency is the fact that some (all?) “faith only” practitioners teach the need to repent. Again, repentance is necessary for salvation (Luke 13:3,5), but since it is, does that not preclude the notion that one can be saved just by believing?

To top this all off, Jesus said in John 6:29, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” The faith only crowd decries the teaching of a person actually needing to do something himself or herself in order to be saved. Such is salvation by works in their book. Yet is not belief (faith) itself a work as defined by Jesus? What did Jesus mean when he called it a “work of God”? Did He mean that faith is something that God does? Of course not. Faith is man's action. Faith in Jesus as the Christ is a work of God in the sense that it is something that God has mandated. In the same manner, repentance, confession and immersion are works of God in that they are acts that God has commanded. Even though they are done by man, they are not man-made works. To rule these out because they are “man's attempt to save himself by his works” would be to also rule out faith itself!

I can think of several people who teach that salvation is by faith alone but I have yet to find anyone who is consistent in their teaching of this error. We need to take God's Word and help them understand the inconsistency of their doctrine so that they can walk the path to heaven (Matthew 7:13-14).

