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THE SURE WORD
By Jonnie Hutchison

IS SALVATION BY “FAITH ONLY”?

A denominational creed book states, “wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort” (Book of Common Prayer, No. XI). Sometime ago this writer had a man tell him that he did not believe that baptism was essential to salvation. He further stated that he believed one could be saved by simply believing that Jesus is the Christ. He believed in “faith only” salvation. It would do well for us to examine this belief in view of Bible teaching.

It may surprise some to learn that the only time the words “faith only” appear in the Bible in the same verse is James 2:24 which reads, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and **NOT by faith only.**” According to this passage is one saved by “faith only?” The obvious answer is NO! The passage clearly states that one is not justified before God by “faith only.” It also teaches that there is a kind of works that is necessary on the part of man in order that justification might take place. Are these works of human merit? Do we earn our salvation by human works? No (Ephesians 2:8-9). Are these the works of the Law of Moses? No (Galatians 5:4). Are these works of the flesh? Absolutely not (Galatians 5:19-21). None of these kinds of works lead to justification but neither does “faith only.” Could it be possible that the works that the book of James declares are necessary to one’s justification is simply obedience to what God requires for one’s salvation from sin? Does the Bible not tell us that Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation to all who **obey Him**”? (Hebrews 5:8-9). Whom will God punish with “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord”? The answer is “those who do not know God, and those who **do not obey** the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8-9). Whose souls are purified? The Bible answers in 1 Peter 1:22, “Since you have purified your souls in **obeying** the truth...” It should be obvious from these passages that without obedience to what Jesus commands, man has no hope of justification before God.

In the great “faith chapter” of the New Testament (Hebrews 11), one may easily see that saving faith is always coupled with obedience to the will of God. Saving faith is an active, energetic, obedient faith. The faith that saves is the faith that takes God at His word and does what He says do. The only complete faith is an obedient faith. Such faith will not question nor doubt the commands of God but simply yield in obedience to them. This is justification by works of obedience and not by “faith only.”

To say that one is saved by faith is true. To say that one is saved by “faith only” is a direct contradiction of the plain statement of scripture. (Read Acts 17:11).