

Transcript 156

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. This is part two of our series where we're basically going through three of the major ones in scripture. We believe that salvation is by grace alone, which we covered in the previous episode, by faith alone, which we'll be talking about today, in Christ alone. Topic today again is salvation by faith alone. One of the rallying cries, if not the primary rallying cry of the Reformation. One of the truly the most important questions in all of Christian theologies. Joining me today is Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries and Jeff, the administrator of bibleref.com. So Jeff, won't you start us off. When someone says salvation is by faith alone, what exactly does that mean?

Jeff Laird

Faith alone is something that's very easy to misunderstand. And that's good that we start with that definition because a lot of times when when people want to object to the idea that we're saved by faith alone, what they're really objecting to is something that Biblical Christians don't believe either. And there's a lot of things that people think of as the faith that we're talking about that are not. Sometimes it's something like just agreement. Something as simple as saying, well, I just I said a prayer. Or I was raised as a Christian. Or I think Jesus is good. And yeah, I I believe that he'll save me. Something very sort of shallow and indistinct like that. That's really not the faith that we're talking about.

Jeff Laird

And we're going to get into the idea that faith does not involve our personal efforts. It doesn't involve works and rituals and things like that. But the Bible expresses real saving faith as when a person is beyond intellectual agreement. That they have this submissive, repentant trust in Jesus Christ. That means that you you have to have a position where you agree with God about your sin and what your sin is. And that you are going to rely on Him for that. It doesn't just mean saying, Oh well, somebody said I was supposed to check this box, so I checked this box. That's not saving faith.

Jeff Laird

So when Christians talk about the idea that we're saved by faith alone, we are not saying that it's just some random, meaningless agreement with God. And it's difficult for us to gauge that. And this is also a place where we get where we get confused. When we talk about how do we judge whether or not we are saved or whether another person is saved. The Bible tells us that you can't really know what's going on in another person heart. So it's very, very difficult, dangerous even for us to assume that we know what's happening in somebody else. And the point is not that we're supposed to say this person is acting, speaking, behaving in a certain way. So I am sure. I am 100% certain that that person is or is not a believer. That doesn't work because I'm not God. But what we can do is we can say God tells us we're supposed to test ourselves. He does give us reasons to to look. So there are reasons for us to examine and say is the faith that I have actual saving faith or is it not actual saving faith. And the thing that that's important is that we have to have saving faith, repentant, submissive trust in Jesus Christ. That is the faith that we say is required for salvation, and it is the only kind of faith that brings us to salvation. It is

not some other kind of faith, but it's also not anything that includes things we do or things we say or rituals that we participate in.

Kevin Stone

Ephesians 2 verses 8- 9 is kind of the go to passage when we talk about this whole idea of of faith having faith for salvation. For by grace are you saved through faith, that Scripture says, not of works. So there's a contrast there between the the faith and the not of works lest any man should boast. And one of the places that we can go to in Scripture to get some lessons on faith is actually the the miracles of Jesus. They illustrate the the necessity of faith so well and how faith works with what Jesus does as faith and Jesus connect as it were. And then we have these miracles that happened.

Kevin Stone

Charles Riley wrote a book called The Miracles of Our Lord, and in it he said this quote, “the main purpose of the miracles was to teach to reveal. But the miracles also remind us of the consequences of sin, sickness, blindness, death and of the power of the Lord to do something about those consequences. That is why many of his physical cures illustrate so well the spiritual salvation secured when he died and rose from the dead,” end of quote. So often in Jesus miracles we see that he is commending faith. Those who were healed had faith. And Jesus identifies their faith as the means of their deliverance.

Kevin Stone

I'd like to take a look very briefly here at Mark Chapter 5. There are two miracles that are recorded here and both of them involve the faith of the one who was healed. The one is the healing of the woman who had the issue of blood for 12 years and the other is the raising of Gyrus's daughter, who was 12 years old. I'll start reading here in verse 22. As Gyrus has come to the Lord and he falls down at his feet and he worships him and we we read this, one of the synagogue leaders named Gyrus came. And when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him. My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live. So Jesus went with him. Obviously, Gyrus had faith in Jesus as he came to Jesus specifically and asked him to heal his daughter of this illness.

Kevin Stone

On their way, there is an interruption. Verse 24, a large crowd followed and pressed around him, and a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had. Yet instead of getting better, she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak because she thought if I just touch his clothes I will be healed. Immediately, her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once, Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked who touched my clothes, and at this point the disciples are all are wondering why he's asking this because the crowd is so great and everybody's jostling everybody. But the woman comes forward and identifies herself. And then in verse 34 Jesus says this to her, daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering. Literal translation of that verse would be your faith has saved you. Your faith has healed you. Literally, your faith has saved you. So it was the faith of the woman that saved her, not the physical touch. And Jesus goes out of his way to make sure that she knows this, that it was not simply her hand that was touching his clothes. Wasn't the physical touch. It was her faith that was reaching out to Jesus. And that is what healed her. Literally

saved her. The faith that he that she placed in Jesus. Her hand, was simply the contact point between her faith and the person of Jesus Christ. And anytime you have those two things coming together, faith and Jesus, wonderful things happen. And we see that all the way through scripture.

Kevin Stone

Well, after she is healed, then we continue with the story of Gyrus verse 35 of Mark Chapter 5, while Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the House of Gyrus, the synagogue leader. Your daughter is dead, they said. Why bother the teacher any more? Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, don't be afraid. Just believe. So again, we have an emphasis on faith. Jesus says just believe or I guess we could phrase it this way, faith alone. Don't be afraid, Gyrus. Have faith alone. Because there was nothing else for Gyrus to do. What else could he do? His daughter was dead. So even if you were wondering, you know, maybe maybe there's some kind of a potion we can mix. Maybe there's some kind of a ritual that we can rely on. Maybe there's a ceremony we can perform. Maybe there's a prayer we can recite. Jesus says no, no a thousand times no. Just believe. Have faith alone.

Kevin Stone

So many of Jesus miracles can be illustrations of our salvation. I mean, we know what happens in the story of Gyrus. Jesus goes to the house, goes to the room where the body of his daughter is lying and he he raises her from the dead. It's the power of Christ coupled with the faith of Gyrus. And so we have Jesus physical miracles here in this world, reversing the effects of sin in the physical world. But that's a wonderful illustration of how Jesus salvation reverses the effects of sin and the heart. In fact removes the sin from the heart. So Gyrus daughter is raised from the dead and in a very similar way Ephesians chapter two we who were dead in our trespasses and sins have been raised by faith in Jesus Christ.

Shea Houdmann

I I remember struggling with this, the whole faith alone. Is our natural inclination is to want to do something to somehow earn it, to contribute, and that's what we talked a lot about last week. But this is Kevin described with the woman who was healed, or Gyrus, nothing that they did that wasn't her touching him. It wasn't Gyrus coming to Jesus. That it was their faith in him that resulted in Christ performing the the miracles that he did. And similarly it's not as if our faith somehow makes us worthy of salvation. It's it's an act of receiving. It's an act of trust. To me, the best illustration I've heard, and no illustration is perfect, is illustration of using a chair. That you look over at a chair and you look at it and say, wow, that looks like a chair, that if I sit in it would hold me up. Yeah, well, that's more of like an intellectual faith. Like Jeff was talking about at the beginning. That's just I intellectually acknowledge that that is a chair that looks sturdy enough to hold me. Biblical faith when we're talking about the faith on is actually sitting in that chair, relying on that chair to hold you up. So it's not as if our sitting in the chair makes the chair hold us up. No, it's recognizing that that chair is capable of holding us. Similarly, trusting in Christ, it's not our trust that does anything. It's our trust that relies on what Christ has already done, his full provision of salvation. It's that faithful reliance. It's that, as Jeff described, repentant submission to God's plan of salvation. Recognizing there's nothing that we can do that can make us worthy of it, rather, God offers it as a gift that we receive by faith.

Shea Houdmann

I look at like versus like Acts 16:31 where the Philippian jailer asked the apostle Paul like Sir, what must I do to be saved? And Paul responds not with the long list of works we have to do, he says, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Kevin Stone

Amen.

Shea Houdmann

There is perhaps the clearest description of here's a question how can I be saved? And Paul's response? Believe and you will be saved. Trust in Christ alone. Rely on his provision of salvation and you will be saved. No works. And we're going to discuss the role that works play because that's what makes this so controversial. But the act of receiving salvation is an act of faith, trust. Jesus, you've done the work. I am trusting you and you alone to save me. That's what faith alone is.

Jeff Laird

There's a lot that goes into the idea of faith alone, infers what it implies. And Kevin, you were talking about the woman who, you know, had had the the issue. And there's a there's a part in that where it talks about her not being able to stand up, I believe. Or there's a woman that Jesus heals in the Book of Luke and he mentions that she can't straighten her back. She's just not able to stand up. And it's it's an interesting little tidbit in here that in Greek, that woman that Jesus healed who couldn't stand up, it describes what she couldn't do with her back, and it uses a word that means completely. It means that she couldn't completely stand up and straighten her back. And then in Hebrews 7:25, that exact same word is used to describe the way Christ saves us, where it says that he can save to the uttermost, or he saves completely. So when when Jesus heals this woman in Luke, he heals her so that she can now completely, perfectly, exactly as intended, straighten her back. That's the way the Christ saves us. And faith alone, that is very, very different from saying Christ saves us most of the way and then I have to do the rest, or I have to work to earn the rest, or I have to complete the process, and things like that. Faith alone means that we are not doing anything. We are not accomplishing anything for the sake of our salvation. We're trusting, we're accepting, we're receiving. But there is no work. There's no effort, there's no merit, there's no anything that we're doing that brings that.

Jeff Laird

And then that implies other things about our salvation. It implies things about whether or not it's possible for a person to lose their salvation. It implies a lot of things about whether or not a person can demonstrate their salvation to people in a meaningful way, or whether they can't. Whether or not I can, if I'm gonna do something bad enough to lose my salvation. What does that mean? Am I saved completely and I not saved completely? So the faith alone comes into more than just the idea of how do we get there? It also has implications for what does it mean? What does it look like? Whether or not we can keep our salvation. And those are all things again, that people get confused with when we talk about faith alone, that we need to clarify.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, I think the the very phrase faith alone carries with it the implication that it's not by works. You know we we aren't adding anything to faith. We come to Christ empty handed. And we come with just

trusting in him, having that full assurance and confidence in him. There is only one reason why we're going to be in heaven someday and that is because of God's gracious salvation through Christ, and we place our faith, our trust in him and in him alone. But it's the faith is the means by which God has ordained that we will come to Christ, and we really can't add anything to it.

Kevin Stone

Few years ago I went to a museum to take a look at a traveling display that they had there on the impressionist painters. And so let's say that while I was there at the museum, let's just say that this happened, that I was standing before a masterpiece of Monet. But I had brought with me to the museum a little paintbrush and a can of paint. And so as I stand there before the Monet, I take out my paintbrush and I dip it in the paint. And I say, you know what, this painting is great, but let me just add a couple little brush strokes to this painting. Well, immediately the museum guards would be tackling me from every direction. They would knock the brush out of my hand. They would put me in handcuffs. They would lead me away and lock me up and probably throw away the key. Why? Because that work of art, they would say, is perfect the way it is. It's finished. There is nothing more that needs to be done with it. And I can argue I can argue all I want, but yeah, it's it's it's very nice, but I think that I can improve on the water lilies. I think that a little bit of my work will actually improve things. And they would lock me up because I would be exactly wrong.

Kevin Stone

I cannot add to that masterpiece without subtracting from it. It's paradoxical, but it's true. You cannot add to a masterpiece without actually subtracting from it. You subtract from its value, you subtract from its worth and it's the same way with Christ. Jesus salvation is a masterpiece. It is the master work of God. It is his masterpiece of grace. And anytime that I might say, well, I think that what Jesus did there was very good. I like what Jesus did, but let me just add a few strokes of my own good works to this. God says no. It's finished the way it is. It is perfect in the truest sense of the word. Jesus sacrifice on the cross is perfect. It covered sin. Atoned for sin perfectly. In fact, on the cross, Jesus said it is finished. Masterpiece is done. We don't add anything to it. If we try, with our good works to add to our salvation, to help us earn salvation, we're actually subtracting from the sacrifice of Christ, God's gracious salvation.

Jeff Laird

It's another area where the implications mean something. If the sacrifice that Christ made is perfect, if it's finished, if it saves to the uttermost then that raises a lot of questions about the idea that I could somehow do something, say something, or act in such a way that that salvation would no longer apply. And this is the concept that we talk about with eternal security. And here again is where saving faith comes in. A lot of people who object to eternal security object because their perspective is well, if a person doesn't ever really follow Christ, doesn't really love God, and just walks away from the faith, what does that really mean? Well, let's drive back to the definition that we started with in the beginning. Actual saving faith, this repentance, submissive, transforming faith that is something that applies that blood of Christ. And if that's true, then we should be leaning on versus like John 10:28 that says nobody can take these people from me. Nobody can pull them out of my hands. So faith alone comes along with these other ideas. If I believe that it's possible for me to behave in such a way that I'm no longer saved or that God's going to abandon me then I am functionally saying that I believe that my salvation is in part dependent on my actions, my good behavior, my good deeds, and that's a difficult

thing to square with the idea of being faith alone. And then that whole idea is hard to square with what Scripture says about the fact that it's God who accomplishes this. It's Christ who accomplishes this. I'm not working for it. I'm not obtaining it. I'm just accepting it. And that's a big difference when you think about how it all works out in practice.

Shea Houdmann

And Jeff, that's an excellent point. I mean, while this is not an episode on eternal security, eternal security is an excellent way of really studying what a person believes about salvation. Because if they believe the salvation can be lost, that does impact what do you believe about how salvation is received? And you often find it a correlation there that if you're believing that you must do certain things to maintain your salvation, are you really believing your salvation was received by faith? But this whole conversation, like just talked about the faith alone being the rallying cry of the Reformation, and that that was the many other SOLAS, like alones, that Martin Luther and other reformers emphasized that faith alone was the biggest. As the the Catholic Church had added so many things you had to do, rituals you had to observe, acts you had to do, good works you had to do in order to maintain your salvation in order to be saved. That salvation by faith had been lost, let alone salvation by faith alone had been lost. But salvation by faith period had been lost. It become a if I obey the teachings of the church, all these teachings, I have a chance of being saved. And it reached that desperate a rejection of what the Bible actually teaches.

Shea Houdmann

So since then, there's been a continued divide between Protestants, evangelicals, and Catholics about what exactly, faith alone means. And Catholics will respond with you saying that God does not require good works. That good works are clear about what's what's the point of being saved if it doesn't like change your life. And it's like, well, hold on, that's not what faith alone means. Faith alone means you're saved by faith alone. By receiving the perfect and complete sacrifice of Christ. You're saved by that alone. But it's also important to teach that that salvation will never be alone. The salvation will inevitably result in good works. Now we're not here to say how much good works, how much of a change life. That's there's so many things that that is dependent on, is the person being discipled, the person being taught. Does the person have access to God's word? There's so many things that play into a role of how much our life changes. But to say the salvation is by faith alone is not the same thing as saying that salvation will be alone. Go to James two, which talks about the faith without works is dead. Saying that a faith in Christ, trusting him alone for salvation will result in changes. First Corinthians 5:17 says we're a new creation, so again, not getting into how much works. How quickly these changes occur in those sorts of things, but saying that salvation is by faith alone is not equivalent to saying that salvation will be alone, or that salvation will be void of good works and life change.

Kevin Stone

Going back to what Jesus told Gyrus and Mark Chapter 5, Jesus said don't be afraid, only believe. And sometimes I think that is like the hardest command of all. I mean, don't be afraid and then just believe. Let go of your own efforts, your own attempts to be worthy in God's sight and justice trust Jesus without fear. But what does John 3:16 say? For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. And what's that verse saying other than just believe. Whoever believes, will have eternal life.

Jeff Laird

I think really when we come down to brass tacks, there's a couple places that this is, it's got significant implications. And we've we've had articles, podcasts, all sorts of discussion on these. There's discussions about how God's sovereignty interacts with this idea. Because if we say that we are saved by faith alone, there's the question of how much of that is our responsibility, how much of that is God's. And there's a lot of different systems that try to figure that out. We know the Bible says that we have a responsibility and that God is completely in control and completely in charge. We have the definition of what faith really is, that we have to be careful about saying we're talking saving faith. We're not just talking about intellectual belief or ascent. And then we have the idea of what does that mean in in practice. And the idea that our faith is not alone, it's what saves, but it does not come all by itself is definitely something that's controversial.

Jeff Laird

A lot of people struggle with that. They have a very hard time separating the idea of a person who is saved and saved only by faith and then in addition to that, that saving faith already completed already saved, already done, being something that's going to naturally lead to a person responding to God's will in a certain way. There's a lot of people who, as soon as you start to say this person does not speak, act, think, behave in an even remotely Christian manner and they think that somehow what you're doing is you are turning away from grace. You're turning away from faith alone. And that's that's not the case. The Bible actually says it's possible for people to deceive themselves about their relationship with Christ. Jesus makes a point of saying they're going people who are going to look at him at the end and say but but didn't I do this? And didn't I say this? And and wasn't I really a believer? And he's going to go no, because I never knew you.

Jeff Laird

So it's OK for us to say that faith alone is the thing that saves, but it's also very reasonable and important that the Bible points out that we're supposed to examine ourselves, test ourselves, see if you are in the faith. So we don't ever want to take faith alone to be an excuse to say I can just be casual about my relationship with God. That's one extreme. The other extreme is to say that I need to be so obsessed and paranoid about earning it, or deserving it that I stop trusting God and I start trying to do things myself. There's there's really those two sides to those that we have to be careful of and either one of them is dangerous because both of them misunderstand what grace is really all about.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely. And we've mentioned eternal security a couple of times. The biggest objection is always, well, if eternal security is true that means you can live your life however you want and still be saved. And that's a similar argument to faith alone like, well, if you're saying all you have to do is receive salvation gift that Christ offers, does that mean we could live however we want? And ultimately probably getting in trouble for saying is ultimately yes, that is what it believes. If Christ is truly done, all the work we are saved the moment we receive that. But with that said, let me be very clear that salvation we receive will have an impact. It will transform us. It will change us. It will result in good works. It will result in increased obedience to God and his word. Those changes are and like use the word inevitable. This is God doing that work. It's God who saves us and is God who continues the

process of sanctifying us, of making us more like Christ. And all of that is dependent on Christ. Salvation is by faith alone, but that faith that results in a new creation will never be alone. And I cannot emphasize that is the proper perspective. Salvation by faith alone, that faith will not be alone.

Jeff Laird

I really like to emphasize the idea of symptoms. Just as a way to help make that clear and to make that understood. It is possible for a person to actually have certain conditions or certain diseases or whatever else, and not demonstrate symptoms that anybody else can see. That is possible. So when we look at the fact that we are saved by faith alone, it is possible that in a given moment or over a given period of time that, in theory, a person could show no evidence whatsoever that they've actually been saved. That could be because of spiritual immaturity. It could be because of a little bit of hard headedness. It could be all sorts of different reasons. It's possible. That's a separate question from whether or not it's reasonable for that person or other people to believe that that person is legitimately saved.

Jeff Laird

That's where the difference comes in. We can accept the idea that I, as a human being a limited person, can't perfectly judge another person's salvation. I can't look at somebody and say nope, that's too much. That's too far. I know that that person's not saved. Likewise, I can't presume to say ohh they seem like a really, really Christian person. They must be a believer. I can accept that there's limitations there, but Scripture also tells us, Paul tells us that when people behave in heinously sinful ways and claim to be Christians, we're not even supposed to eat with those people. Paul says you're supposed to examine yourself to see if you're in the faith. James says don't just be a hearer of the word. Be a doer as well.

Jeff Laird

So when we talk about that issue and faith alone, and then what does that mean as far as a person's lifestyle is concerned, that's really where the difference is. It just comes down to how reasonable is it for a person to actually think that someone's a believer. In theory, any person could be a believer in Christ. God's going to separate the tares and the wheat. That's his responsibility. That's not mine. But that doesn't mean that we should be careless or we should be casual and say, well, it doesn't matter. There's nothing I can do. There's nothing I can see. There's nothing I can look at. Because if you don't show any symptoms at all, then it's not reasonable to believe that you have that saving faith that we talked about before.

Shea Houdmann

Well said, Jeff. We close this episode with again believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. By grace are you saved through faith, not of works. That's our emphasis here. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Jeff, Kevin, thank you for joining me today for excellent and vitally important conversation. And again, questions related to salvation are by far are favorite, so to speak, questions to answer as they get to the heart of the matter. They get to a person's eternal destiny. And there's related to salvation. It's perhaps no more important question than how salvation is actually received. And we believe the consistent message of Scripture that salvation is by faith alone. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.