

Are We Saved by Faith Alone?

by Sebastian R Fama

Are we saved by faith alone? Martin Luther thought so. In fact, in his translation of the Bible he changed Romans 3:28 which reads: "For we consider that a person is justified by faith, apart from works of the law." He inserted the word alone, after the word faith.

It is true that we are saved by faith. But what is faith? If we have faith, we believe everything the Bible teaches. And the Bible also says we are saved by:

1. Baptism - 1 Peter 3:21
2. Keeping the Commandments - Matthew 19:17
3. Giving to the poor Matthew - 25:34-36
4. Believing in Jesus - John 3:15
5. Receiving the Eucharist - John 6:52
6. Perseverance in good works - Romans 2:7
7. Calling on the name of the Lord - Romans 10:13

Obviously, all these verses work together. That is why James says: "See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24).

When Paul says "works apart from the law" he is referring to the Jewish ceremonial law and not the moral law. The Jewish ceremonial law was something that distinguished Jewish Christians from Gentile Christians. That is why Paul starts off chapter 3 by asking: "What advantage is there then in being a Jew? What is the value of circumcision?" (3:1).

To make the point even stronger he concludes chapter three as he began it; by comparing Jews and Gentiles and by making the point that there is no difference between them in the sight of God:

Does God belong to the Jews alone? Does he not belong to the Gentiles too? Yes, also to Gentiles, for God is one and will justify the circumcised on the basis of faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (Romans 3:29-30).

Note that in in Romans 2:13 Paul also says: "Those who observe the law will be justified." And yet there is no contradiction here. And that is because in that case, he was speaking about the moral law, which is still binding.