

APRIL 2007—*Faith or Works?*

Throughout history, believers have struggled to properly understand the relationship between faith and works. Failure to grasp this relationship has tormented many souls over the centuries and continues to do so today.

Fortunately for us, the heart of the issue is clearly articulated by C.S. Lewis in just a few words that can put our minds and hearts at ease.

Christians have often disputed as to whether what leads the Christian home is good actions, or Faith in Christ. I have no right really to speak on such a difficult question, but it does seem to me like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary. A serious moral effort is the only thing that will bring you to the point where you throw up the sponge. Faith in Christ is the only thing to save you from despair at that point: and out of that Faith in Him good actions must inevitably come...

The Bible really seems to clinch the matter when it puts the two things together into one amazing sentence. The first half is, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"—which looks as if everything depended on us and our good actions: but the second half goes on, "For it is God who worketh in you"—which looks as if God did everything and we nothing. I am afraid that is the sort of thing we come up against in Christianity. I am puzzled, but I am not surprised. You see, we are now trying to understand, and to separate into water-tight compartments, what exactly God does and what man does when God and man are working together. And, of course, we begin by thinking it is like two men working together, so that you could say, "He did this bit and I did that." But this way of thinking breaks down. God is not like that. He is inside you as well as outside: even if we could understand who did what, I do not think human language could properly express it. In the attempt to express it different Churches say different things. But you will find that even those who insist most strongly on the importance of good actions tell you you need Faith; and even those who insist most strongly on Faith tell you to do good actions.¹

Saint Paul, the apostle of grace, says clearly that we are saved by faith, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet he goes on to say that we are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). For Paul, works follow faith as day follows night, and their source is the indwelling Holy Spirit working in the depths of our hearts. Good works are the inevitable fruit and visible evidence of a living faith in Jesus Christ and are the hallmark of all true believers.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins edition, 2001), pp. 148-149.