

## The Faith that Justifies and the Decline of the Anglican Church?

I am very suspicious of much of the current evangelical material that is discussing the relationship between 'faith' and 'works'. The material conveys a fundamental misunderstanding of the doctrine of justification by faith, as expressed by the English Reformers in the formularies of the Anglican Faith within the BCP; its 39 Articles, and Homilies.

The current material, in seeking to demonstrate the importance of Christian obedience / works as a corollary to faith, unfortunately compartmentalizes faith and works. The material declares boldly that an individual is saved by 'faith alone', and then indicates that such faith will be active in obedience or works; works being a consequence of faith. This creates a dichotomy between faith and works. It conveys the distinct idea that while we are saved by faith, (and the ideal of such faith is that 'works' are a 'flow on') our 'works' are not essential to our salvation! One gets the distinct impression that 'works' are 'tacked on' to our 'justifying faith', but they are in no way part of it! **Friends, our works cannot save us, nor do they in any way contribute to our salvation, but they are none the less a vital component of true justifying faith, as understood by the Reformers.** Faith that rests on Christ for our atonement is relentless in its pursuit of obedience. New Testament 'faith' is the act of trusting in the good news of the gospel, and simultaneously desiring to be transformed by it; it is the intellectual apprehension of the atonement, and the immediate impulse towards the imitation of the One who is the object of faith.

It is 'faith alone' that saves (faith in the atoning sacrifice/blood of Christ; our 'works' supply no 'merit') but such faith is not a bare intellectual grasp of some objective truths. Saving faith is 'incarnate'; it is 'fleshed out' – a strident striving for an ever increasing obedience to God/Christ's law. While such imperfect strivings for obedience are not 'rewarded' with salvation, they are an integral part of genuine or true New Testament faith. Faith and works must not be separated so as to drive a wedge between the two. **We are not saved by 'works', but we will not be saved without them!** Why? Because genuine faith in the atoning work of Christ lives in submission to the law of Christ; what Paul calls the 'obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5). **While 'grace', or 'God's gift of salvation', grants us a reprieve from the law's condemnation, it does not release us from the law's obligation!**

People who call themselves Christians and are slack in obedience have no biblical confidence that they will be saved - no matter how well they can articulate the commonly held (but misunderstood) notion of justification by faith! If such people are 'slack' with Scripture (adopting a smorgasbord approach, picking and choosing the parts they prefer) there must be grave doubt as to their salvation! (Mark 8:38) If they are 'slack' with regard to attending the public 'services' of the church; indifferent as to whether they attend or not, and 'slack' about 'serving' the body of Christ, the Church, there must be grave doubt as to salvation! **Works of obedience are the only appropriate response to God's grace/love.** If there is little or no response of obedience from the persons who professes faith, there is every indication that they have misunderstood New Testament faith; that they are in fact 'devoid' of it! They are really immersed in the idolatry of pleasing themselves, and their 'assurance' that they are, 'justified by faith', will prove a hollow and ineffectual insurance on the day of judgement!

Unless the evangelical church returns to its moorings we will be destined to perpetuate the errors that surround the doctrine of justification by faith. What are those 'moorings' you ask?

The Anglican Church has great moorings, primarily - the Bible; but our Anglican Reformers wisely, so as to prevent heresy rampaging in the church, compiled a Prayer Book. The great tragedy today is that the 'moorings' contained in that Prayer Book are not known, nor utilized! What are our 'moorings' in the Prayer Book? They are our '39 Articles', our two books of Homilies, our Liturgy/Collects. If the church is to arise from its misunderstanding' about 'grace' we need to get back to our 'moorings'; and we need to 'meditate' on those 'moorings'. What do these 'moorings' of our historic past, the contents of our Prayer book, have to say about the nature of grace?

Let me read to you some of the contents of the Homily on Faith.

"There is one faith which in Scripture is called a **dead** faith; which brings forth no good works, but which is idle, barren and unfruitful...

Another faith there is in Scripture, which is not ..idle, unfruitful and dead .. and is not in the mouth and profession only, but it lives and stirs inwardly in the heart .. gladly doing all good works.." p.36/7

"Therefore, when men hear in Scripture so high commendations of faith, that it makes us to please God, to live with God, and to be the children of God; if they then fantasize that they be set at liberty from doing all good works, and live as they list (lust), **they trifle with God and deceive themselves.**" p.38

"All holy Scripture agreeable bears witness that a true and living faith does bring forth good works: and therefore every man must examine and try himself diligently, to know whether he has the same true living faith in his heart unfeignedly or not; which he shall know by the fruits thereof. Many that professed the faith of Christ were in this error, that they thought they know God and believed in Him, when their life declared the contrary. Which error St John in his 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle confutes writing in this manner: "hereby we are sure that we know God, if we keep His commandments..." p.42

**"No man should think that he has a living (true) faith which Scripture commands, when he lives not obediently to God's laws"** p.44

"Let us not therefore, Christian people, try and examine our faith, what it is: **let us not flatter ourselves, but look upon our works, and judge of our faith, what it is .. your deeds and works must be an open testimonial of your faith; otherwise, your faith, being without good works, is but the devil's faith, the faith of the wicked, a fantasy of faith, and not a true Christian faith.**" p.46

"so those that be christened, and have the knowledge of God and of Christ's merits, and yet of set purpose do live idly, without good works, thinking the name of a naked faith to be either sufficient for them, or else setting their minds upon vain pleasures of this world do live in sin without repentance, not uttering the fruits that belong to such a high profession; **upon such presumptuous persons and willful sinners**

**must needs remain the great vengeance of God, and eternal punishment in hell...” p.47**

At the conclusion of the Homily we read these words,

**‘And travailling continually during your life thus in observing the commandments of God, (wherein consists the pure, principal, and direct honour of God, and which, wrought in faith, God has ordained to be the right trade and path-way unto heaven;) you shall not fail, as Christ has promised, to come to that blessed and eternal life, where you shall live in glory and joy with God forever.’**

p. 43 ‘Cranmer’s Selected Writings by Carl S Meyer)

Stephen Westerholm – Prof of Biblical studies at McMasters Uni, Hamilton, Ontario, says,

“that God places demands for righteous behaviour on His moral creatures is presupposed in everything that Paul writes; the law, in spelling them out, performs a divine function. Paul’s point is not that people are not required to do what is right or that the law is wrong in telling them to do so, but that only faith in Jesus Christ provides a solution for humanities captivity to sin.” p.381

“Our faith in Christ does not free us from works but from the false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works.” Luther p.361 Stephen Westerholm ‘Perspectives Old and New on Paul.’ Pub. 2004

Now you, or a critic may say, - “Why are you quoting this NT scholar? I can quote another, just as qualified, who will give an opposing position!”

Yes, indeed you may – there are plenty! But I quote Stephen Westerholm, not simply because I agree with him or because he supports my position.

I quote him because he holds/supports the Reformers who gave us the BCP/Anglican formularies; he supports the position of our Articles/homilies. In other words, he holds the faith that was expressed by the NT writers concerning the nature of faith/works. And friends, let me say, if you find a NT scholar deviating from this position – allowing you greater liberty to avoid obedience, hold such teaching in great suspicion! Any teaching that allows you to be less obedient, and panders to your selfishness, and allows you to be more conformed to the spirit of the age, is not likely to be from God’s Spirit. Don’t let supposed scholarship get in the way of your total submission to the commandments of Scripture. By the way, have you noticed how all this ‘new’ teaching always allows you more self indulgence? – “I don’t want to submit, and now I don’t have to, because I been told that’s not what the word means!”

“I want to use my Sundays for some sport/or recreation, or a pleasant lunch, and now I know that regular attendance is ‘legalism’!” Watch out on the Day of judgement!

Am I saying that a Christian can ultimately ‘lose’ his/her salvation?

It depends on how you ‘define’ a Christian! If you mean by a Christian someone who understands that salvation is by God’s grace alone (Christ’s atoning death) and who strives diligently to live ‘under’ Christ’s Lordship – seeking to obey all Christ

commanded through the Apostles - is sincere in his repentance of sin, with a firm adherence to being a 'member' of Christ's Church/sharing his gifts and encouraging other Christians – 'never leaving them in the lurch' and worshipping Christ on each Lord's Day — **such a Christian can possess every confidence concerning their final salvation)**

But if you mean by a Christian one who understands God's grace in Christ, yet neglects a thorough obedience to Christ's commands – sitting loosely to such commands and selecting only what suits him, and who is negligent concerning regular Lord's Day worship – coming and going when it suits him, – then, I would say that such a Christian is standing on eggshells concerning his salvation and could well forfeit or lose it!! I leave it to you to decide what sort of Christian you are!

But remember again our 'moorings' and meditate upon these words of Cranmer,

**'And travailing continually during your life thus in observing the commandments of God, (wherein consists the pure, principal, and direct honour of God, and which, wrought in faith, God has ordained to be the right trade and path-way unto heaven;) you shall not fail, as Christ has promised, to come to that blessed and eternal life, where you shall live in glory and joy with God forever.'**

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