

from all sin, and (2) a perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ. Mormons fail to realize that keeping laws (even if called “the laws of the gospel”) never has been the basis of anyone’s righteousness in the sight of God. The Bible declares, “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom 3:20). The righteousness that God demands of sinners and which he provides for them in the gospel is *without or apart from* the law. “But now the righteousness of God *without the law* is manifest.” Believers are justified “*freely by his grace*” through Christ’s redemption (Rom 3:21,24).

Mormon priests, like the priests of old, perform their works in vain. “And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Heb 10:11). How pitiful that Mormons still think salvation depends upon subservience to such priests, and that there can be no salvation outside their fold!

Except men come to these legal administrators and learn of Christ and his laws as newly revealed on earth, they cannot be saved in his everlasting kingdom.³

Mormon priests are no more able to save than Israel’s priests. What a contrast to the full assurance enjoyed by trusting in Christ who by one sacrifice for sin “*perfected forever* them that are sanctified.” Of believers, not law-keepers, God says, “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 10:14,17).

Mormons don’t realize that in addition to pardon from all their sins, they may have Christ’s perfect righteousness ascribed to them, “even the righteousness of God which is *by faith* of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Rom 3:21-22). David knew “the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness *without works*” (Rom 4:6). Abraham “*believed God* and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom 4:3-5). And why was so much written about Abraham’s righteousness by faith? “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; *but for us also*, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom 4:23-24).

Mormons who refuse the free gift of complete pardon and perfect righteousness are much like the Jews of Paul’s day, “They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:2-3). A righteous God demands that we be righteous! Our only hope is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ!

FAITH ALONE

Mormons teach that justification comes “through the faith *and* good works of the sinner,” and “is conditioned upon individual effort.”⁴ Talmadge ridicules the doctrine of “justification by belief alone” calling it “a most pernicious doctrine.”⁵ He accuses us of teaching that “a wordy profession of belief shall open the doors of heaven to the sinner.”⁶ This caricature of Christian doctrine is not taught by the Christian Church. The atonement of Christ alone opens the doors of heaven. A sinner who by faith identifies himself with Christ is justified, not by what he does, but by what Christ has done.

McConkie claims to believe in grace alone:

All men are saved by grace alone without any act on their part, meaning that they are resurrected and become immortal because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.⁷

However, listen to him further on salvation:

All men by the grace of God have the power to gain eternal life. This is called salvation by grace coupled with obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.⁸ Salvation in the kingdom of God is available because of the atoning blood of Christ. But it is received only on condition of faith, repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end in keeping the commandments of God.⁹

By **adding works to faith**, Mormons destroy the very essence of **grace**. “And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom 11:6). These principles are mutually exclusive because works receive a merited reward but grace is given to the undeserving. “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that *worketh not*, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:4-5). Grace is unmerited favor, the free gift of God. The Mormons’ attempted combination of works and faith reveals a misunderstanding of both.

FAITH PLUS WORKS

Mormons teach *baptismal regeneration*. “As a result of this act of obedience remission of sins is granted.”¹⁰ On the authority of *Doctrine and Covenants*, one who is not baptized cannot be saved: “And he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not, and is not baptized, shall be damned” (112:29). Jesus did not add the last negative which is logically very strong. It’s one thing to say, “He that is of age votes,” but quite another to say, “Anyone who does not vote

is not of age.” It’s one thing to say, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16), but quite another to say, “He that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned” (Joseph Smith, Mormon founder). Baptism is essential for Mormons because they think it is “the means whereby each sinner may receive a cleansing from his past.”¹¹ And the only baptism they recognize as valid is one performed by Mormon officials.¹²

Also necessary for salvation is the *laying on of hands* by the Mormon priesthood in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Of this and baptism, it is said, “Without these ordinances one could not be saved.”¹³

The bestowal of the Holy Ghost, which is to be regarded as a conferred right to his ministrations, is effected through the ordinance of the Holy Priesthood, accompanied by the imposition of the hands of him or those officiating.¹⁴

But the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit comes upon all who believe (Rom 8:9,14; 1 Cor 12:13). Mormons who view baptism and laying on of hands as essential to salvation desperately need to be confronted with Paul’s words to those who preached *faith plus works* in his day:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: *not of works*, lest any man should boast. (Eph 2:8-9)

FAITH “WITHOUT WORKS”

Why is the Mormon message a “false” gospel? The Bible is filled with passages that teach that we are justified by faith alone¹⁵—“justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28). The gospel proclaims “salvation by faith.” Mormons teach that justification comes by “faith **plus** obedience.” Their gospel proclaims “salvation by works.”

Justification is by faith alone; it is specifically said to be “**without works**.” In fact, faith must be alone, or it is not “faith” in the biblical sense of the word. The very idea of “believing on Christ” means that we trust him as the One who *finished* the “work” of salvation, so that there’s nothing left for us to do. “But to him that **worketh not**, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness **without works**” (Rom 4:5-6). Faith and works here exclude one another. When the “Judaizers” of Galatia tried to teach justification by “faith **plus** circumcision,” Paul condemned them as “false brethren,” teaching “another gospel” (a *false gospel*), and uttered

the strongest of curses upon them (Gal 1:6-9; 5:1-4). The Scriptures teach that to add any “works” to “faith” is to believe in “salvation by works” and to place oneself under a curse. But someone may say,

Yes, but Paul was speaking here only of the works of the Mosaic law, not works of obedience to Christ. It’s true that we can’t be justified by faith plus keeping the law of Moses, but we can be justified by faith plus obedience to the commands of Christ.

Nothing could be further from the truth! When Paul set out to contrast “salvation by faith” with “salvation by works,” he was not for one moment limiting himself to the works of the law of Moses. He often singled out the law because it was the particular “religious hang-up” of the people of his day. But when Paul says that justification is *by faith* and that *works* can have no part in it, he is speaking of *all human activity or goodness whatsoever*.

Consider Romans 9:11, “For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.” What does Paul mean by the term “works”?—**doing “any good or evil.”** Or again, God “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace” (2 Tim 1:9). Here our *works* are contrasted with “God’s own purpose and grace.” What are “works” then? Not the deeds of the law of Moses only, but **anything in the realm of human activity and initiative**. Even truly righteous deeds are ruled out: “*Not by works of righteousness* which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). It’s obvious that Paul intended his words to mean any and all religious ceremonies or commandments that men might set forth alongside of faith as a “condition” of justification, not just the ones that happened to be a problem in his own day.

FAITH WORKS BY LOVE

Another common objection is this: “But James teaches that *faith without works is dead*” (James 2:14-26). That’s very true! But we need to understand that Paul and James are *not* dealing with the same issue. Paul is teaching on the nature of *justification* while James is teaching on the nature of *faith*. James is telling people who “profess” to be a Christian, who show no evidence in their lives of a likeness to Christ, to show him their faith (James 2:18). But faith cannot be seen; thus the best way for us to prove our faith is to be “doers of the

word, and not hearers only" (*James 1:22*). Those who "do" the word of God will live a righteous life in loving obedience to Christ (*Matt 7:21*; *1 John 2:17*). In other words, their "faith will work by love" (*Gal 5:6*). That's why James said: "I will shew thee my faith *by my works*" (*2:18*).

"Faith alone" justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone! It's always accompanied by good works. It's always seen through a righteous life of godliness and holiness. James is concerned for professing believers who are not truly saved; they're not justified. They have faith, but their faith is "dead." It's useless, idle, and unfruitful (*James 2:17,20*). Only that faith that bears fruit is alive and genuine. Jesus taught that a tree is known by its fruit (*Matt 7:16-20*). Just as works do not produce justification, the fruit does not bring the tree into existence. The fruit only reveals what type of tree it is and whether it's alive or dead.

When James says that Abraham was "justified by works when he offered up Isaac" (*2:21*), he doesn't mean that Abraham's sins were not forgiven until that time. Abraham was justified some 35 years before! (*see Rom 4:9-11*). James is simply saying that justifying faith always manifests itself through works. Our *persons* are justified before God "by faith"; our *faith* is justified before men "by works." "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (*1 John 2:4*). The true believer is a follower of Christ who has a heart that desires to obey his commands; but good works are the outcome (*Eph 2:10*), not the cause (*Eph 2:8-9*), of salvation in Christ.

Paul and James are defending the gospel against two different errors—two deadly kinds of faith. They are not antagonists facing each other with crossed swords; they stand back to back, confronting different foes of the gospel. James is warning of the wrong kind of faith—that is, mere intellectual assent or belief in facts. Even if these facts are true, this type of faith cannot save. Paul's concern is over a different error—faith with the wrong object. Paul was addressing those who were trusting in their own works or obedience, rather than trusting Christ alone for salvation. This kind of faith (faith in works) does produce a changed life. Like the Pharisees, people who believe that works are necessary in order to be saved are zealous to perform these works. But neither faith in facts nor faith in works saves. Paul and James both taught that salvation is received "by faith"—trusting in the finished work of Christ alone. This is true saving faith; and with it comes eternal life and a new heart that desires to glorify Christ.

FAITH IS NOT A WORK

Someone may say again:

But even if you say that men are saved by faith alone, still believing itself is just another type of work—something men do in obedience to Christ which obtains God's favor.

Not at all! When God pronounces sinners to be righteous in his sight, he's looking to the blood and merits of Christ, not the faith of man! The gospel is not a "new law" in some sense of commanding us to "do" something in order to "get saved." On the contrary, the very idea of "believing in Christ" involves giving up entirely on all of our own "doing" and ability! Justifying faith, in its very essence, is reliance upon another. It's the attitude of one who has given up all hope of anything virtuous he could ever do!

The sinner who trusts in Christ is like the poor swimmer who finally realizes that left to his own efforts he'll drown, ceases to struggle against the lifeguard, and completely relaxes in his care. Whoever claims that faith is just the beginning of salvation, and that you must do this and that struggling to keep afloat the rest of your life, has not trusted in Christ.

Our Lord gives a fine illustration of this in John's gospel when he explains saving faith in terms of the serpent in the wilderness (*Num 21:4-9*). Just as the serpent was lifted up by Moses that men might look upon it and be saved, so Jesus would be lifted up on the cross that whosoever believes—"looks"—upon him might have eternal life. How were men saved in relation to the serpent? by "looking plus works"? by "looking plus baptism"? by "looking plus obedience"? No! by "looking" alone!—"When he looketh upon it, he shall live" (*Num 21:8*). And since faith is the gaze of the soul upon Christ, it is impossible to exercise biblical faith and at the same time be looking to ourselves and our obedience. Those who put confidence in anything but Christ—whether it be a reformed life, church membership, baptism, or laying on of hands—are still trusting in their own works and must surely perish.

When Moses lifted up the serpent of brass on that pole, those Israelites were to cease completely from doing anything; their eyes were to be totally directed away from themselves. The promise was, "Every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live" (*Num 21:8*). That was their sole instruction: just look! Nothing else. They were not to consider the size of the serpent to determine the extent of the venom; they were not to

lance the wound and go about sucking out the poison; they were not to apply a tourniquet or watch the swelling; they were not to call for help from their kinsmen, a doctor, or a priest; they were not even so much as to cast another glance at the wound—there was nothing for them but just to believe God, and cease from all their doing, and all their efforts, and all their anxieties, and look away!

Our eyes are to be fastened upon Christ alone, lifted up as our substitute at Calvary. "If a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld...he lived" (*Num 21:9*). He lived! "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (*John 3:14-15*). Salvation reaches us just where we are, and just as we are: helpless, guilty, and needy. True faith is not a giver, but a receiver. It's not an actor, but an onlooker. It's not a builder, but a beholder. Look and Live!

*Not saved are we by trying,
from self can come no aid;
Tis on the blood relying,
once for our ransom paid.
Tis looking unto Jesus,
the holy One and Just;
Tis his great work that saves us;
it is not try, but trust.*

*No deeds of ours are needed,
to make Christ's merit more;
No frames of mind or feelings,
can add to his great store.
Tis simply to receive him,
the holy One and Just;
Tis only to believe him,
it is not try, but trust.*

References:

¹Talmadge, *Articles of Faith*, p17 ²McConkie, *What the Mormons Think of Christ*, p27 ³*Ibid.*, p31 ⁴Talmadge, *op. cit.*, pp87,89 ⁵*Ibid.*, p107 ⁶*Ibid.*, p108 ⁷McConkie, *op. cit.*, p24 ⁸*Ibid.*, p28 ⁹Talmadge, *op. cit.*, p120 ¹⁰Charles W. Penrose, *Repentance and Baptism*, p5 ¹¹*Baptism, How, and By Whom Administered?* (Salt Lake City: Desert News Press) ¹²Samuel O. Bennion, *Fundamental Principles of the Gospel*, p35 ¹³Talmadge, *op. cit.*, p165 ¹⁴John 3:14-18; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 13:39; 16:31; Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-22; 5:1-2; 9:30-33; 10:1-13; 1 Cor 1:21; Gal 2:16; 3:1-14; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 3:8-9; 1 Pet 2:6-8; 1 John 5:1

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST vs. mormonism

There's one thing all false religion cannot put up with—the **freeness** of salvation. Something has to be contributed, they think, the performance of human effort, some type of obedience to their religious order. As they see it, for a person to receive salvation, he must first give something himself! This is true with all false gospels—a sinner's "works" always play a vital role in his acceptance with God. This is the Mormon message.

One of their most influential authors, James E. Talmadge, says:

We hold that salvation from sin is obtainable only through obedience, and that while the door to the kingdom has been opened by the sacrificial death and the resurrection of our Lord the Christ, no man may enter there except by his personal and voluntary application expressed in terms of obedience to the prescribed laws and ordinances of the gospel.¹

Christ's work only "opens the door"; man's work must do the rest. Christ makes the down payment; Mormons must make payments all their lives. For Mormons, then, the atonement was not completely provided by Christ. Elder Bruce R. McConkie ridicules the Christian belief that salvation is based on the merits of Christ alone and not on the ground of human merit.

Christians speak often of the blood of Christ and its cleansing power. Much that is believed and taught on this subject, however, is such utter nonsense and so palpably false that to believe it is to lose one's salvation. Many go so far, for instance, as to pretend, at least, to believe that if we confess Christ with our lips and avow that we accept him as our personal Savior, we are thereby saved. His blood, without any other act than mere belief, they say, makes us clean.²

It is true that the doctrine of "justification by faith" can be distorted. Nevertheless, anyone who believes that the atoning work of Christ provided only an opportunity for people to achieve their own salvation has missed the heart of the gospel.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Mormons need to hear the glad tidings of justification by faith. It provides (1) pardon