

**“Without (Sound, Loving, working) faith (that endures to the end) it is impossible to please Him.”  
(Heb 11:9)**

✠ **Lecture X: Faith Vs. Works** ✠

For most of Church history, salvation was seen as comprehending all of life: Christians believed in Christ, were baptized, and were nurtured in their salvation in the Church. Key doctrines of the faith centered on the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the atonement.

In Western Europe during the sixteenth century, however, and even before, justifiable concern arose among the Reformers over a prevailing understanding that salvation depended on human works of merit, and not upon the grace and mercy of God. Justification by faith alone (*Sola Fides*, Lat.) became the slogan of salvation for the Protestants.\*

The Reformation debate in the West was late-breaking news for the Orthodox East: why this new polarization of faith and works? It had been settled since the apostolic era that (final) salvation was granted by the mercy of God to righteous men and women. Those baptized into our Lord Jesus Christ were called to believe in Him and do good works.

A discussion of faith *versus* works was unprecedented in Orthodox thought. For Orthodox Christians, faith is living, dynamic, continuous – never static or merely point-in-time. Faith is not something that a Christian exercises only at one critical moment, expecting it to cover all the rest of his (her) life. True faith is not just a decision; it’s a way of life.

This is why the modern evangelical Protestant question, “Are you saved?” gives pause to an Orthodox believer. A final difficulty for Orthodox Christians is the word *alone*. Justification by faith poses no problem. But justification by faith *alone* brings up an objection. It contradicts (Holy) Scripture, which says: “You see that **a man is justified by works, and not by faith only**” (**Jam 2:24**). (Orthodox Study Bible).

✠ **Faith as the first step to salvation** ✠

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (**Jn.8: 24**), “He who believes and is baptized, will be saved” (**Mk 16:16**). Faith is indeed the first step toward salvation, but it is not the only one. Sometimes, the first step is used in the Holy Bible to signify the whole matter or process that starts by it. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it is the only step.

✠ **Example # 1:**

Simeon the elder took the Child Jesus up in his arms and said, “Lord, now you are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for **my eyes have seen Your salvation**” (**Lk 2:29-30**).

→ St. Simeon did not see the Lord’s salvation, which took place through the shedding of His precious blood on the cross thirty three years later!

→ He only saw the Incarnation and Birth of the Lord. But because this Incarnation was the first executive step leading to salvation, he said in confidence, “*my eyes have seen Your salvation*”.

→ Here the Incarnation of the Lord being the first step of salvation was used to signify the whole process. But does this mean that we are saved by merely the birth of our Lord? Certainly not, for it is written, “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (**Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22**).

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\* Two more foundational teachings were Scripture Alone (*Sola Scriptura*) & Grace Alone (*Sola Gratia*), both of which were discussed and refuted in previous lectures.

### ✚ Example # 2:

St. Paul and St. Silas said to the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you **and your household**” (Acts 16:31).

→ How could his family be saved merely by his faith? Does the faith of a person save another?

→ The proper meaning is that the faith of the jailer serves as the first step toward his own salvation. Then this first step may convince his family to enter into the faith as well and be a good start that will lead the whole household to salvation.

→ This is evident in the following verses, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him **and to all who were in his house...** And immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:32-33).

→ The faith of the jailer was the first step toward the salvation of his household and the Holy Bible used it to signify the whole process but that doesn’t cancel the other steps that were required (their faith and baptism).

### ✚ Example # 3:

Our Lord said to Zacchaeus, “Today salvation has come to this house” (Lk 19:9). This He said when Zacchaeus promised to pay back four times what he had taken from others.

→ The words of our Lord mean that Zacchaeus’ repentance was the first step toward the salvation of the whole household, but it was not the only step. Each individual in that house had to repent and believe.

→ Moreover, this was merely a promise of the salvation that would be later available through the blood of Our Lord on the cross.

### ✚ Example # 4:

St. Paul said, “Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1). St. James said, “You see then that a man is **justified by works** and not by faith only” (Jam 2:24).

→ St. Paul used the first step (faith) to signify the whole matter that starts with this step (justification). On the other hand, St. James explains that this first step (faith) is not the only one.

### ✚ Example # 5:

St. Paul said that our Lord appeared to him and told him, “... that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified **by faith** in Me” (Acts 26:18).

On a different occasion, St. Paul said that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (mentioned above) and that he declared to everyone, “that they should **repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance**” (Acts 26:19-20).

→ In the first account of the heavenly vision, the first step (faith) was used to signify the whole matter of sanctification but in the second account of the **same** vision it is clear that faith is not the only step and that it must be followed by other steps (repentance/ turning to God/ good works).

✧ **Example # 6:**

St. Paul said, “**Whoever** calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (**Rom 10: 13**). Someone may read this verse and think that **anyone** who believes will be saved, but our Lord said, “**Not everyone** who says to Me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (**Mat 7:21**).

→ It is obvious that faith is the first step and should be followed by keeping the commandments.

✧ **Example # 7:**

After the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, our Lord said, “**Watch** therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (**Mt 25:13**).

→ Let’s apply these words to the foolish virgins: **To watch** is the first step for salvation but it is not the only step, even though it is the only one mentioned by our Lord.

1<sup>st</sup> step → Watch

2<sup>nd</sup> step → Realize that you don’t have oil.

3<sup>rd</sup> step → Ask the wise virgins for help.

4<sup>th</sup> step → Take their advice and go quickly buy oil.

5<sup>th</sup> step → Return before the bridegroom arrives and closes the door.

→ Suppose these virgins considered the first step (to watch) to be the only step for salvation and they didn’t do anything else but stay awake and watch, **wouldn’t they still be called foolish?**

→ Likewise the person who considers faith to be the **only** step toward salvation is called **FOOLISH:** “But do you want to know **O foolish man**, that faith without works is dead?” (**Jam 2:20**).

→ Separating works from faith is like separating the spirit from the body, the result is **DEATH:** “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead also” (**Jam 2:26**).

→ It is very interesting that St. James likened the good works to the spirit and faith to the body and not vice versa!

✧ **Conclusion:**

Anyone who preaches faith **alone** with no works as the way of salvation is a **FOOL** and is in fact **preaching DEATH**, “Do you not know O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (**Jam 2:20**). Indeed, “what does it profit my brethren if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith (alone) save him?” (**Jam 2:14**).

In fact, faith is in itself work! → The Jews asked our lord, “What shall we do that we may **work the works of God?**” He answered them saying, “This is **the work** of God, that you **believe** in Him whom He sent” (**Jn 6:28,29**).

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