

Back to Bible Basics

Issue 24

WE ARE NOT SAVED BY FAITH “ONLY”

Ian McPherson

One of the great problems in religion is the “faith only” concept. This was introduced by John Calvin in spite of the explicit statement in Scripture that we are **not** saved by faith alone (James 2:23-24). Calvin’s false concept of faith has permeated the whole denominational world. The Bible clearly says that we are **justified by faith and not by works**, but the works spoken of are the **works of the Law of Moses** (Romans 3:28). The Bible teaches that Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the law by living the Law of Moses perfectly. He was therefore able to abolish the **law of merit** and replace it with **the law of faith** which brought freedom, forgiveness and grace (Romans 3:22-30, John 1:17).

However, the purpose of this article is to ask ourselves if it is possible that we sometimes subconsciously, without realizing it, have been guilty of changing the meaning of other doctrines by mentally putting an “only” in front of them. Consider the following

DO I BELIEVE THAT BAPTISM “ONLY” SAVES? Christ said “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” **Mark 16:16.** Some get from this that baptism is all that is needed and is a free ticket to heaven. However this is not so, there are two laws of pardon in Scripture. Baptism gets the sinner into Christ (Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:26-27), but after baptism the saved person must continue to walk in the light (1John 1:7-9).

DO I BELIEVE THAT CHURCH ATTENDANCE “ONLY” SAVES? Although regular church attendance is essential for salvation (Hebrew 10:25), it is not the **only** sign of faithfulness. God is just as concerned with how we live through the week as He is about how we worship on Sundays. We cannot partake of the Lord’s Table on Sunday and the table of demons during the week (1 Corinthians 10:21).

DO I BELIEVE THAT SOUND DOCTRINE “ONLY” SAVES?

The church at Ephesus learned from the mouth of Jesus Himself that sound doctrine is essential, but that **sound doctrine alone** was not enough. They were admonished by Christ to repent or lose their candlestick (Revelation 1:5). The Ephesians were so busy defending the church against doctrinal error that they had lost their first love (**Revelation 2:1-5**). Many years before John wrote revelation, Paul admonished the church at Ephesus to preach the **truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)**. It seems that over the years they had forgotten this exhortation. We must therefore be careful not to fall into this same trap. The cross of Christ and the love of souls is the very centre of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:23, 2:2). No matter how sound we are, if we do not have love we are no better than “sounding brass” or a “tinkling symbol” (1 Corinthians 13:1)

DO I BELIEVE GRACE “ONLY” SAVES? Rubel Shelly, who was once a faithful gospel preacher, went astray because he rejected the need for a pattern. He now says: *“I reject a pattern theology; We are not trying to reproduce the true church. The true church has never existed. The true church is an arrogant claim”* (Seek the Old Paths February 1994). Brother Shelly has fallen into the hands of the devil. He has no standard to live by. The New Testament is clearly a **pattern** that must be **“obeyed from the heart”** (Romans 6:17), and that we must be **“hold fast to”** (2 Timothy 1:13). Another brother who fell into the same trap was Max Lucado: He said; *“The Bible is a love letter as opposed from a blue print... for me, for years Christianity was a moral code. It is now becoming a love affair. For years there were rules and regulations, now it’s a relationship”* (Tulsa World March 12 1989)

Both Rubel and Max have made the same mistake. They have **beheaded the body of Christ**, and made the same mistake as Calvin. They have made the church a useless institution, and have left themselves without a rule of faith. They have desecrated the beautiful concept of grace. The gospel certainly is a love affair with Jesus. In fact the cross is the greatest love story ever told (Romans 5:8-9). They fail to realize that love for Christ cannot be expressed without **keeping His commandments** (1 John 5:3, John 14:15).

We have learnt that faith is useless unless it is accompanied by works of obedience, and that life after baptism must be lived faithfully according to the pattern. We must also be careful not to be so engrossed in holding fast to the pattern, that we lose our first love.

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Extreme conservatism cuts out Christ's heart, and liberalism decapitates Him. The gospel is a message of love and grace, but it is also a strict moral code, even stricter than the Law of Moses (Hebrews 2:1-3, 10:28-29). We need to stay on the straight, yet clearly defined road of the gospel (Matthew 7:13-14). This involves going neither to the right nor to the left (Josh 1:7). God's grace does not exclude the need to follow the pattern.

Jeremiah gave Israel an admonition. He said: "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, we will not walk *therein*." **Jeremiah 6:16. Brethren let us be careful not to follow in their path!** 

KEEP FOCUSED ON THINGS THAT ARE PURE, LOVELY AND VIRTUOUS

Brett Rutherford

God initially created everything in a pure and perfect state. After the creation week God surveyed all that He had made and "...saw that it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). The Hebrew word that is translated as "good" in English is the word "*towb*." James Strong defines "*towb*" as "beautiful, the best, fair" etc (Strong p. 59). In other words, God could not have improved on His creation. This statement in Genesis 1:31 especially applies to the crowning glory of God's creation - mankind. We have been made with a body, brain and mind that could not get any better. However, our body, brain and mind can be diminished (damaged) through our actions and thoughts. When we get bogged down in the affairs of this world then our mind and brain are not functioning as they were designed to function. God created us to focus on "*...whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - MEDITATE ON THESE THINGS*" (Philippians 4:8).

Neuroscientists like Dr. John B. Arden are beginning to discover that their research on the brain is revealing some surprising results. Dr. Arden reveals in his book, [Rewire Your Brain](#) that the brain is physically damaged by anxiety and focusing on the negative. However, Dr. Arden has revealed that the damage done to the brain through negative thinking can be repaired by focusing your brain on positive things. Dr. Arden has revealed though his research that many people who are receiving medication for depression do not need it. They simply need to turn their minds to positive things and shut out negative influences. For example, it is recommended that people suffering from depression need natural

sunlight. He goes on to say that those who are susceptible to depression need to stop watching the news. Almost every news story is negative. According to Dr. Arden, sunlight (God's medicine) has a positive chemical effect on the brain that creates a sense of euphoria in our minds. Open up your window shades and let the sun stream in whenever you get down.

Turn off the news if you find yourself getting down from time to time. The negativity that is a feature of nearly every story on the evening news creates unnecessary anxiety and fear. These are two emotions that we must master and suppress. Also, don't fill your mind with dark, disturbing content that is a feature of so many television shows. Remember that God has made man to benefit from following after His instructions, not the instruction of the world (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Furthermore, God has stated that it is good for a man to find gainful employment (II Thessalonians 3:10). God commanded Adam and Eve to tend the garden in Genesis 2:15. Even though Adam and Eve were placed in a perfect garden paradise, God knew that giving that first couple employment was important for their overall well-being. In other words, God designed man to work. It is no surprise to find out that many people who suffer from depression are unemployed. When the great prophet Elijah became depressed, God told him to get up and get back to work (I Kings 19:1-8). Not surprisingly, neuroscientists are now telling us that the brain needs to be engaged in positive, constructive activity in order to be healthy.

The recent discoveries by neuroscientists is just another case of science catching up with the Bible. The Bible teaches that the brain is designed to focus on good things. The Word of God also tells us that we should refrain from negative thoughts. For example, Jesus taught us not to worry in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 6:25-34). Paul told us to focus on the things of good report (Philippians 4:8). Controlling our thoughts is a part of bringing our bodies under control.

Finally, it is important to note that faith is fueled by good, positive thinking. The woman who had an issue of blood believed that if she could just touch the hem of Jesus' garment she could be healed. She did touch the hem of His garment and she was healed (Luke 8:43-48). It was the power of positive thinking that led that woman to be healed that day. If our hearts are filled with fear and anxiety then there is no room for faith. Fear condemns while faith saves (Revelation 21:8; Remember we can accomplish great things when Christ is on our side (Colossians 1:19-23).

References

John B. Arden, [Rewire Your Brain](#) (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010)

James Strong, [Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible](#) (Iowa Falls IA: World, 1976)