



Faith Alone

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FAITH COMES FIRST



*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Ephesians 2:10

You have often heard me say that the Christian life has two dimensions: the first is faith, and the second is good works. A believer should live a devout life and always do what is right. But the first dimension of the Christian life—faith—is more essential. The second dimension—good works—is never as valuable as faith. People of the world, however, adore good works. They regard them to be far higher than faith.

Good works have always been valued more highly than faith. Of course, it's true that we should do good works and respect the importance of them. But we should be careful that we don't elevate good works to such an extent that faith and Christ become secondary. If we esteem them too highly, good works can become the greatest idolatry. This has occurred both inside and outside of Christianity. Some people value good works so much that they overlook faith in Christ. They preach about and praise their own works instead of God's works.

Faith should be first. After faith is preached, then we should teach good works. It is faith—*without* good works and *prior to* good works—that takes us to heaven. We come to God through faith alone.

January 1

WE LIVE BY FAITH



*For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed,
a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written:
“The righteous will live by faith.”
Romans 1:17*

When I was a monk, I didn't accomplish anything through fasting and prayer. This is because neither I nor any of the other monks acknowledged our sin and lack of reverence for God. We didn't understand original sin, and we didn't realize that unbelief is also sin. We believed and taught that no matter what people do, they can never be certain of God's kindness and mercy. As a result, the more I ran after and looked for Christ, the more he eluded me.

When I realized that it was only through God's grace that I would be enlightened and receive eternal life, I worked diligently to understand what Paul said in Romans 1:17—a righteousness from God is revealed in the gospel. I searched for a long time and tried to understand it again and again. But the Latin words for “a righteousness from God” were in my way. God's righteousness is usually defined as the characteristic by which he is sinless and condemns the sinner. All the teachers except Augustine interpreted God's *righteousness* as God's *anger*. So every time I read it, I wished that God had never revealed the gospel. Who could love a God who is angry and who judges and condemns us?

Finally, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I took a closer look at what the prophet Habakkuk said: “The righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). From this I concluded that life must come from faith. I therefore took the abstract to the concrete level, as we say in school. I related the concept of righteousness to a person becoming righteous. In other words, a person becomes righteous by faith. That opened the whole Bible—even heaven itself—to me!

January 2

WHAT IT MEANS TO BELIEVE



*Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me,
he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me."*

John 12:44

There are two ways to believe. The first way is to believe *about God*, meaning we believe that what is taught about God is really true. It's similar to believing that what is taught about the devil or hell is true. This type of belief is more a statement of knowledge than an expression of faith.

The second way is to believe *in God*. This not only includes believing that what is taught about God is true, but also includes trusting him and daring to be in relationship with him. It means believing without any doubt that he really is who he says he is, and he will do all he says he will do. I wouldn't believe any person to this same degree, no matter how highly others might praise him. It's easy to believe that someone is godly, but it's another matter to rely completely on him.

Those who believe in God believe everything written about God in Scripture. They dare to believe this in life and in death. This faith makes them true Christians and gives them everything they desire from God. A person with an evil, hypocritical heart can't have this type of faith, for it's a living faith, as described in the first commandment: "I am the LORD your God. . . . You shall have no other gods" (Exodus 20:2–3).

Therefore, the little word *in* is well placed and should be carefully noted. We don't say, "I believe God the Father," or "I believe about God the Father," but "I believe *in* God the Father, *in* Jesus Christ, *in* the Holy Spirit." Only God can give us this type of faith.

January 3