

## **My Mormon Friend**

- Share the story of Deb
- I learned why it is good to know what you believe so that you can spot false beliefs when they come. They are often clever sounding.
- We often believe something simply because we were told it.
- It's helpful to know why we believe, what we believe

*And today's text in Ephesians 2 gives us that chance.*

## **Why We Are Zooming In on Doctrine**

- I think pastors are given a hard time for not focusing their preaching on what people want to hear, or the claim they avoid certain topics/afraid to preach.
- Scriptures give us focus and direction and balance.
- Today Ephesians 2:1-10 (**turn there now**) gives us a chance to do a deeper dive into a core and vital doctrine.
- This issue :: **Are we saved by faith alone, or by faith and our efforts/works?** :: has been a tension point throughout Christendom history.
- It's not just a technical theological debate. It's about the very heart of the gospel.
- Today we are going to look at 3 different views.

*It's my hope that today will be a fun and interesting look, and that it helps us all know the freedom that comes from knowing that we are saved by Grace, through Faith, and not by works.*

## Ephesians 2:1-10

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body<sup>[a]</sup> and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.<sup>[b]</sup> 4 But<sup>[c]</sup> God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

### Let take a look at the History of the doctrine 'faith alone'

- In the early church, believers wrestled with **Judaizers** :: people who wanted to add the works of the Law to faith in Jesus (see Galatians, Acts 15).
- **Paul wrote fiercely** against this, especially in Galatians and Romans. This was after James wrote his letter.
- The early church taught this harmony between faith and works until around 300AD
- Then around the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Augustine and Pelagius begin writing (Pelagius bad and condemned as a heretic)
- 1000-1500 Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas & Others – emphasize required human effort
- 16<sup>th</sup> century, the protestant reformation: Luther and Calvin leaned into faith alone as part of the reformation

- Catholic church responded with the Council of Trent, clarifying their position and declaring condemnation for the faith alone position. They have since softened their language over the years.

## Understanding the 3 Views

Let's walk through **three main perspectives** you'll encounter under the umbrella of Christendom:

### 1. Faith Alone (Protestant Evangelical / Baptist View)

- Justification is by **grace alone through faith alone**.
- Justification is a legal term that means your debt is paid in full, or the judgement has been satisfied.
- Works are the **fruit**, not the **root**, of salvation.
- Ephesians 2:8–9, <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Romans 4:1-5

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in[a] him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

Galatians 2:16

yet we know that a person is not justified<sup>[b]</sup> by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

## 2. Faith + Works as Partnership (Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, Others)

- Salvation is ultimately **earned through obedience** and effort, though God's grace helps.
- This view will highlight other passages that seem to teach differently. For example (**Heb 5:9** says *And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him*)  
To also be fair, there are verses that can seem to be clearly saying works are important to be justified. **James 2:24** says *"You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."*  
It seems convincing when used with out context.
- Often based on other writings (e.g., 2 Nephi 25:23 – "saved after all we can do").
- Emphasis is on **human effort to secure or finish salvation**.
- **My visit to the Mormons... (staircase)**

## 3. Faith + Works (Catholic View)

- This is where it gets more complicated. Instead of just brushing over, ignoring, or changing verses, the catholic approach is quite the opposite. They very much apply the verses and lean into all of scripture, however, the definitions are different, which changes the meanings.  
Therefore we get into the semantics more. Grace starts the process of salvation, but **cooperation through works** and sacraments maintains it.
- Justification is not just a legal declaration but an **infusion of righteousness** that grows over time. So they include what we call sanctification (growing to be like Jesus) as part of the Justification process.
- Grace, faith and works are **intertwined** in an ongoing process.
- This is their ongoing interpretation of all the same passages of scripture.
- The outcome is similar – Believers in Jesus, living out their faith through love of God and Neighbour. And it becomes more in the realm of the semantics. Does it merit strict separation on that basis? Some evangelicals say yes, some say no.

- The Catholic church clearly says yes, and still officially upholds Canon 9 from the Council of Trent that declares that the view of faith alone is heresy, however, Pope Benedict 16<sup>th</sup> did say that he was open to the faith alone phrasing – if it meant that faith was animated by love. That language was unclear if he was deviating from the official stance, however it was likely more referring to if someone included works as part of faith.

## Why We Hold the Faith-Alone View (From Scripture)

### Ephesians 2:1–10 Summary:

- **vv. 1–3:** Dead in sin. Not weak. **Dead.**
- **vv. 4–7:** “But God...” Rich in mercy. He made us alive. **God acted.**
- **vv. 8–9:** “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith... not by works.”
- **v. 10:** We were **created for** good works :: not saved **by** them.

“We don’t obey to earn salvation. We obey because we’re already saved.”

## 2 Common Objections – that stem from James.0

Because of time, we won’t dive into James 2, but absolutely read it. At face value, he seems to be in direct contrast to Paul’s writings. This is why the book of James was not considered scripture by some early church leaders.

However after further understanding, it was included in the canon of scripture because they recognized it did not contradict at all, but rather it complimented Paul.

### Objection 1: “James says we’re justified by works!”

- Paul and James are using “justified” differently:
  - **Paul** = how you’re declared right before God.

- **James** = how your faith is **proven genuine** before others.
- **Paul** is answering the question 'How are we saved'
- **James** is answering 'what does genuine faith look like'

They're answering **different questions** and addressing **different problems**

*"Paul addresses the root of salvation, James addresses the fruit of salvation"*

### **Objection 2: "Won't this lead to carnal Christianity?"**

- If someone's faith never bears fruit, James says that kind of faith is dead (James 2:17).
- True faith will **produce** works (Galatians 5:6 – "faith working through love").
- If someone does not bear fruit in their life, then they do not have a real faith. That EVERYONE agrees on.
- So assurance of salvation through faith, does not lead to carnality, but a righteous expression of thankfulness and faith through love.

Overall, this doctrine leads us to a faith in the saving work of Jesus – and none of us can boast and claim 'look how good I am!' This also brings an immense amount of freedom in Christ!

### **Why this discussion even matters**

#### **1. Freedom to make Mistakes**

- If our faith does not depend on our efforts, but on the work of God alone, then when we mess up – it's okay because God has already paid the price for that sin.
- This assurance is not a licence to sin. It is not a sedative for the carnal, or a life preserver for the backslider. Rather the professing Christian who persists in the practice of sin, might better be

assured that they are NOT saved. If what you believe, does not affect the way you behave, then your faith is in vain.

- So ongoing persistence and justification of sin, is a dangerous sign of what is in your heart. That is different than the ongoing struggle of sin in all of our lives.

## 2. Freedom from Condemnation

- You're not earning God's love. It's already given.
- You don't have to fake perfection. Your salvation isn't fragile.
- Romans 8:1 – "There is now no condemnation..."

## 3. Freedom from Shame

- You're not "less saved" if you're still figuring it out.
- The Christian life is **transformation**, not instant perfection.
- Remember that God used Abraham, Peter, Paul :: **flawed people on a journey**.

"God doesn't save future versions of you. He saves you as you are :: and transforms you from the inside out."

## 4. Freedom to Love and Serve

- Good works aren't a burden. They're your new **purpose** (Ephesians 2:10).
- You get to live for God :: not because you're trying to earn heaven :: but because heaven came for you.
- (this is different than nearly every other religion!)

## 5. Freedom from Abuse

- I use this phrase to mirror the previous phrases

- What I means is that all faith practices have been guilty of abusing this doctrine to control and manipulate people. “You have to do what I say because God said so and your salvation is on the line.”
- Individuals who don’t understand this doctrine can be controlled and manipulated to behave certain ways. And it’s one of the worst forms of religious abuse.
- When it’s a religious leader, it gets scary. Cults are held together with this. But even parents use threats and guilt trips on their kids, saying “a real Christian doesn’t act that way”, or “a real Christian obeys their parents”. It’s unfortunately all too common, and ends up really hurting people.
- But knowing your salvation is secure because of your faith alone, it can help avoid falling prey to this abuse.

## A Word About Division

- We should avoid **needless division** based on misunderstanding.
- But we should also be clear: **salvation by works is a different gospel**.
- Galatians 1:6–9 makes that very clear.

“Let him be accursed...”

So don’t divide over minor doctrinal preferences :: but **do draw clear lines** when the gospel is at stake.

Ask yourself:

- Are you trusting in Jesus... or in your performance?
- Do you live in fear that you’re not good enough?
- Do you carry shame that Jesus already carried to the cross?



- If you don't see real fruit in your life, then "test yourself"

2 Cor 13:5

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

**Let's pray**