

Faith, Yes, But Not By Faith Alone

by Bill Crews

The religious conceptions and convictions of most people are formed more by their own **environment** – their upbringing and their surroundings – than by *any personal study of the Bible*. Such influence is usually a powerful teacher – whether in the right direction or in the wrong. Even what most people *think* (in their own minds, they can be “so sure”) the Bible teaches comes more from what their parents said to them, from what they heard various preachers say, from what friends and others have said, from what they gleaned from newspapers, magazines, books, movies, TV programs, than from their own reading of the Bible.

The most wide-spread and popular religious conclusion that people entertain is the idea that the Bible teaches that men are saved or justified by “*faith only*.” It may be expressed in many different ways – “only believe,” “all you need is faith,” “just receive Jesus in your heart as your personal Savior,” “faith alone is God’s plan,” “all you have to do is to accept Christ” – but it still comes out the same, that is, **that a sinner is saved solely, only, wholly, entirely by his faith in Christ**, and, therefore, no other condition must be met or commandment must be obeyed to receive salvation.

Reader friend, did you know that the Bible does **NOT** teach this at all? Surely it teaches that men are saved, justified, purified, made righteous *by faith* (**John 8:24; Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 15:9; Mark 16:15-16; Galatians 3:23-27; Romans 3:21-28**), but it nowhere teaches that such a blessing comes by “faith only.” **James 2:24** (read **verses 14-26**) plainly states that we are **NOT** justified by faith only, and other passages clearly teach that other conditions are required (**Acts 3:19** – “*be converted*” or “*turn again*”; **Acts 17:30** – repent; **Romans 10:9-10** – confess Jesus as Lord; **Acts 2:38** – repent and be baptized; etc).

The great and courageous Martin Luther (of the 16th century), in his 1518 German translation of the New Testament, was so convinced that salvation was by faith only that he added the word “only” (the German word “solo”) to **Romans 3:28** to get salvation by “faith only” into the Bible. Disgusted by his own church’s (Roman Catholic) doctrine and practice of salvation by works of merit, he went to the opposite extreme of *denying the necessity of any works at all*. At the time he had decided that James (because of **James 2:14-26**) did not even belong in the Bible because it contradicted what he honestly thought Paul taught in **Romans 4**. What Luther failed to see is this: Every passage that he regarded as teaching that salvation is not by works of any sort is a passage teaching that men are not justified by the works of the Law of Moses or any such law (this would be works of merit and, therefore merited salvation). These passages were designed to answer the “Judaizers” who were binding the law of Moses and the old covenant of fleshly circumcision on the disciples of Christ, Jews and Gentiles (read **Acts 15:1, 5; Galatians 2:3-5, 11-16; 5:2-8** for information on this). **Romans 3** and **4** and **Galatians 2** and **3** deal with this problem of the Judaizers, but so many today, like Luther, think that they were written to deny the necessity of *any works* and to lead us to conclude that salvation is by *faith only*.

But Martin Luther was by no means the last to add the word “only” or “alone” to Bible passages teaching the great doctrine of salvation by faith (a faith that works, an obedient faith). The widely-distributed *Good News For Modern Man, the New Testament in Today’s English Version* (TEV), sponsored and promoted by the American Bible Society, does it in **Romans 1:17; 3:28** and **Galatians 2:16**. The more popular *Living Bible Paraphrased* (not a translation, but only a paraphrase), which takes great liberties on many matters, adds the word “only” in **Romans 4:9, 12** (also compare **John 1:12; Romans 1:17 and 3:21-22**). Newer versions and paraphrases have taken even more liberties.

To say that man cannot be justified by the works of the Law of Moses (**Galatians 2:16**), to say that

[continued on page 362903](#)