

Faith: A Different Perspective

The traditional view of how one is saved is to put your faith in Jesus and what He did on the cross. A good example of this comes from an article from bible.org.

We must acknowledge our sin, and the fact that we are guilty of rejecting Jesus, as well as failing to live according to His standard of righteousness. We must believe in Jesus as God's Messiah, and as God's only provision for our sins. We must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and that He is coming again to judge His enemies and to bless His saints. We must cling to Him alone, trusting only in what He has done on the cross of Calvary in our place, and not in anything we might add to His work. In response to His salvation, we should identify with Jesus publicly by being baptized. (See Deffinbaugh, Robert L., "5. What Must One Do To Be Saved? (Acts 2:37-41)" <https://bible.org/seriespage/5-what-must-one-do-be-saved-acts-237-41>)

I want to be clear that I am in no way condemning Robert's article or bible.org. I am quoting Robert's article as a good example of the classic expression of how one is saved.

From this article, we find a couple of requirements for salvation.

- We must believe in Jesus as our savior
- We must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead

So, what is my response? The traditional model of how one is saved almost always defines 'faith' in terms of what God has already done. For example, in the quote from Robert's article above, the main focus of faith is on what has already happened (i.e., faith Jesus exists, faith that Jesus rose from the dead, etc.). But how can believing in what has already happened be considered 'faith'? As defined by the traditional view, 'Faith' is accepting those things that happened in the past even though we weren't there to witness them ourselves. The classic support for this is Hebrews 11:1: "*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.*" (Heb. 11:1-NET). The emphasis in this passage is believing in "*what we do not see.*" In other words, even though we were not alive when Jesus walked the earth and rose from the dead, we should believe these things happened. But notice that Hebrews 11:1 ends with, "*convinced of what we **do** not see*" (present tense) and does not end with "*convinced of what we **did** not see*" (past tense). This focus on the present tense would suggest the traditional view might not be correct.

I would like to propose (and I do stress "*propose*") a different definition of 'faith.' Instead of 'faith' being defined as the belief in what God has already done, perhaps 'faith' should be defined as the belief in what God is going to do. One of the most important teachings on faith is Hebrews Chapter 11 in which the author provides many historical examples of faith and they all describe faith in God's future promises. By 'faith' Noah, "*being warned by God about things not yet seen,*" built an ark (Heb. 11:7-NASB). By faith, Abraham went to a new land on the promise that he would be the "*father of many nations.*" (Heb. 11:8-9-NASB). "*By faith, even Sarah herself received the ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.*" (Heb. 11:11-NASB). By faith, Abraham was willing to take the life of his only son Isaac on the promise that, "*God is able to raise people even from the dead.*" (Heb. 11:17-19-NASB). There are more examples in Hebrews Chapter 11, but the point is that in none of these cases was the person called upon to have faith in what had already happened; they were called upon to have faith in what was *going* to happen. And in some cases, the person died before God's promises were fulfilled (Heb. 11:39)!

Even more damaging to the traditional view that faith in what God has already done is a requirement for salvation is the fact that many people in the Bible actually spoke to God and thus did not need faith that He exists. Noah (Gen 6:13), Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Isaac (Gen 26:2-5, 24), Jacob (Gen 31:3; 35:1),

Moses (Exodus 3:4-6), and Joshua (Joshua 1:1-9) are some examples. Certainly, none of these people had to have blind faith in God's existence or what God had done.

But even in the New Testament, we know that faith in Christ's existence was not necessary for Jesus' own disciples walked and talked with Christ. Paul spoke to God on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-18). Clearly, Jesus' followers did not need faith in His existence.

But, the most damaging case against the traditional view that faith in Christ's existence or His resurrection is required for salvation is the fact that even Jesus' own disciples needed proof of His resurrection! In Luke 24:33-35, we're told that the two men who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, returned to Jerusalem to tell "*the eleven*" all that had happened and that "*The Lord has really risen...*". But then we're told in Luke 24:38-39 that the disciples still had doubts and had to be shown the nail wounds in Jesus' hands and feet to prove Christ had indeed risen.

And He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why are doubts arising in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you plainly see that I have." (Lk. 24:38-39-NASB)

Remember that Luke 24:33 tells us that the two men from Emmaus returned to Jerusalem and told "*the eleven*" all that had happened. Since "*the eleven*" is a euphemism for all of Jesus' disciples (due to the fact that Judas Iscariot was no longer part of the group), we know that all of Jesus' disciples were present when Jesus appeared in Luke 24:36. It was at this point, that Jesus appears and has to alleviate their doubts by showing them His wounds. So according to the Gospels, all of Jesus' disciples doubted His resurrection! This fact is even more remarkable when we remember that on several occasions Jesus told His disciples that He would have to suffer and die and be raised from the dead (Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23; 20:17-19). We're also told that the disciples witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44). So even though the disciples were told ahead of time that Jesus would have to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead, and even though they witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, they still needed proof of Christ's resurrection. Let that sink in for just a moment.

If the people who walked and talked with Jesus Himself, and who were under His teaching night and day, and who were told ahead of time that He would have to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead, and who witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead still needed evidence that Christ rose from the dead, how can it be said that those living two thousand years later must accept the resurrection on faith as part of the formula to be saved? If this were true, none of Jesus' own disciples would have been saved!

It is my belief that how people are saved does not depend on when or where someone was born. Those who lived before Christ's earthly ministry are saved the same way as those who lived after Christ's earthly ministry. I've never accepted the idea that people who lived in "Old Testament times" got special treatment and didn't have to come to Christ the same way we do today. Obviously, I'm not God, but this would seem very unfair. But requiring faith that God can do what He promises to do (which is to save us), can be universally applied to all people, at all times. Any person, born at any age, who died apart from Christ and who is given the message of salvation in hell (1 Peter 3:19; 4:6) can accept that message by faith. They can freely (without coercion) accept Jesus as their savior because they are putting their faith, not in what God has already done, but faith in what God says He is going to do. The fact that Jesus appears to those in hell to preach to them doesn't negate the need for faith any more than it did when Jesus appeared to His disciples to show them the wounds on His hands and feet. In both cases, the people still needed faith in God's saving power.

Jesus, Himself taught that faith is not believing in His existence, but trusting that God can do what He says He can do. In John 3:14-15, Jesus says, "*And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness [Num 21:8-9], so the Son of Man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him will*

have eternal life." (NLT) Obviously, the Israelites whom Moses (through God) commanded to look at the pole "and live" weren't called upon to have faith in the pole's existence; they were called upon to have faith that God's promise to save them would be fulfilled. In the same way, Jesus was teaching Nicodemus that those who trust that Christ can do what He says He can do, will have eternal life. In other words, "believes in him" does not mean a belief in Jesus' existence, but the belief that Jesus can save them. Later, Jesus follows this same line of reasoning when He says, "For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life." (John 6:40-NLT). Clearly, "believe in him" cannot mean a belief in Jesus' existence for this statement was directed at those who saw Jesus. The term "believe in him" can only mean faith that Jesus can do what He says He can do which is to save them.

Some point to Romans 5:1 as support for the traditional view of justification through faith in Jesus Christ (It's always been a bit fuzzy to me how those on the traditional side define "faith in Christ"). "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," (Rom. 5:1-NASB). Matt Slick summarizes the traditional view when he writes:

The only way out is to be saved by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 5:1). You must trust in what Jesus did on the cross to forgive you of your sins and not trust anything else—not even your own sincerity or works. (Slick, Matt, "How does someone become saved?", <https://carm.org/uncategorized/how-does-someone-become-saved/>. To be clear, I am in no way criticizing Matt Slick. He is simply using scripture to support the traditional view on salvation.)

But if you read Romans Chapter 4, Paul (like Hebrews Chapter 11) uses Abraham as an example of faith and how he had to trust that God would do what He said He would do which was to make him the father of many nations. In Romans 4:3, Paul tells us that Abraham believed in God and this belief was credited to him as righteousness. But what was it that Abraham had faith in? It was God's promise to make Abraham's descendants, "as the stars of heaven in number, and as the innumerable grains of sand along the seashore." (Heb 11:12-NASB). Abraham was not declared righteous because he had faith in what God had already done. Abraham was declared righteous because he had faith in what God was going to do! Paul ends Romans Chapter 4 by telling us that even though Abraham and (more importantly) his wife Sarah were advanced in years, Abraham was completely confident that God would fulfill his promise to make Abraham's descendants very numerous.

*In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, **and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.*** (Rom. 4:18-21-NASB)

So, the 'faith' Paul speaks of in Romans 5:1. that justifies us, is not faith in something God had already done but faith in something God was going to do.

But what about Romans 10:9? Doesn't this teach salvation through faith in what has already happened particularly the resurrection of Christ?

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; (Rom. 10:9-NASB)

Here, Paul seems to be teaching the traditional view that salvation comes through a profession that Jesus is Lord and a belief in His resurrection. But the traditional understanding of this passage seems unlikely for two reasons. First, if one is required to profess Jesus as Lord, this would not only exclude everyone who lived prior to Jesus' earthly ministry, it would also exclude all those who lived during Jesus' earthly ministry but just didn't happen to live near Palestine at the time. I'm not suggesting that Paul did not reach many people in lands far away from Palestine (i.e. Greece, Italy, etc.), I'm only pointing out that Paul would have missed the vast majority of people living at the time (i.e. those living in China, those living in England, etc.). Furthermore, having to profess Jesus as Lord to be saved also excludes those living after Jesus' ministry since there are many people in the world today who will die never hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. If one believes as I do that everyone from all ages and geographical areas must have equal access to salvation, then having to profess Jesus as Lord in this life to be saved, is not reasonable.

Second, in regards to believing in the resurrection of Christ for salvation (which Rom. 10:9 seems to teach), it has already been pointed out that even Jesus' closest companions needed proof that He had risen from the dead. And if those who walked and talked with Jesus needed proof of His resurrection, how can it be said that those living two thousand years later must take it on blind faith? If belief in the resurrection of Christ is required for salvation, it doesn't seem at all likely (or fair) that Jesus would provide proof of His resurrection to the people who needed it the least (i.e., His closest followers) while not providing proof to those who need it the most (i.e., everyone else). It is my belief that if Jesus does preach to the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:19), He won't be asking them if they believe He rose from the dead; Jesus will be asking them if they believe He can save them.

If it is asked, "What was Paul trying to teach regarding the relationship between a belief in the resurrection and salvation?", I can only plead ignorance. Perhaps Romans 10:9 is describing the condition of the person after they have seen the Light? But I am comforted by the fact that if I find Paul's writing challenging at times, I am in good company as Peter sometimes found Paul's writing "*hard to understand*" (2 Peter 3:16) as well. And if Peter, a man full of the Holy Spirit and capable of healing others (Acts 9:32-35) could misinterpret Paul's writings, then perhaps those on the traditional end of the theological spectrum have misinterpreted Romans 10:9 as well.

In closing, let me say that my proposed view of 'faith' is just that, a proposal. I am not claiming to have any special revelation from God, I'm simply "*examining the scriptures*" (Acts 17:11-NASB) and trying to relate them to the view that God might save everyone.

David Burnfield