

Faith and Works

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There is an age-old question handed down by generations of Christians throughout the centuries: are we saved by faith or by works? What is the role of faith in our eternal salvation, and what is the role of our works? Is there a scenario where both become critical to our salvation—even exaltation?

Acting on Faith in Jesus Christ

There are numerous passages in the Bible that boldly state the importance of taking action as believers in Christ. We are called to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22; emphasis added), while being admonished by Jesus that “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21; emphasis added). Although the necessity to act is clearly a call to all Christians, the role of faith is not diminished. Paul told the Ephesians, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

From the epistle of James we read: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. ... But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:18, 20).

To the unsuspecting, these and many other passages from the Bible can seem contradictory. This seeming

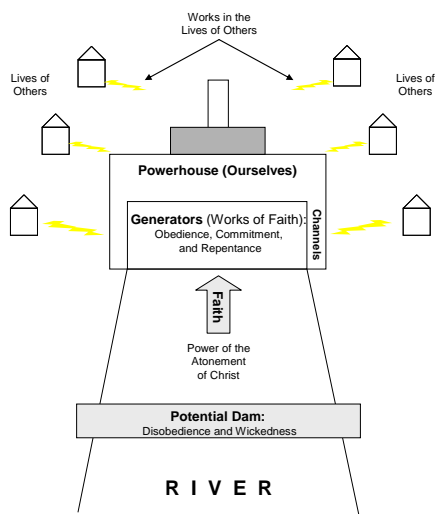
inconsistency arises out of the deep and meaningful relationship between faith and works. Understanding of this relationship creates a freedom of spirit and joy in one’s life towards the valuing of both faith and works in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Powerhouse Analogy of Faith and Works

Of faith and works Gerald N. Lund of the Seventy wrote: “We are like a powerhouse on a mighty river. The powerhouse has no power residing in itself; the potential power rests in the energy of the river. When that source of power flows through the generators of the power plant, power is transferred from the river to the power plant and sent out into the homes [or lives] of others.”

“So it is with faith. The power to achieve justification does not reside in man. Man requires the power of the atonement of Christ flowing into him. If no power is being generated, one does not—indeed, cannot—turn the generators by hand (justification by works); but rather, an effort is made to remove those things which have blocked the power from flowing into the generators (working righteousness as a result of faith)...one can understand why the scriptures clearly stress that faith includes works (see James 2:17–26); that is, obedience, commitment, and repentance—these are the works of faith that open up the channels so that the power of the atoning sacrifice of Christ can flow into us, redeem us from sin, and bring us back into the presence of God. Disobedience and wickedness dam those channels...The righteous works in themselves do not save us. The atoning power of God saves us. But our righteous works, activated by our faith in the Savior, are the condition for the operation of that power.”

“We are saved by grace—saved by Christ’s love from physical and spiritual death; saved by Christ’s love from Adam’s fall and our own; saved from sin and transgression by the grace or gifts of God. The atoning power of God unto salvation is a freely available gift from him—but our works of righteousness are essential to bring the gift into power in our lives. (Gerald N. Lund, “Salvation: By Grace or by Works?”, Ensign, Apr. 1981, 17.)



Understanding the interaction between faith and works is critical to our testimonies of Jesus Christ. When we fully comprehend the importance of both faith and works, we are able to build the kingdom of God on earth, serve our fellow man, and enjoy the blessings that come from obedience in following the commandments of God. The prophet Joseph F. Smith said: "We must believe that it is through his grace that we are saved, that he performed for us that labor which we were unable to perform for ourselves, and did for us those things which were essential to our salvation, which were beyond our power; and also that we are under the commandment and the necessity of performing the labors that are required of us as set forth in the commandments known as the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Doctrines of Salvation, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56)

The Works of Faith

Works are not just the kind and charitable things we do to for others. Works include obedience, commitment, and repentance. The prophet Joseph Smith taught, "Let truth and righteousness prevail and abound in you; and in all things be temperate; abstain from drunkenness, and from swearing, and from all profane language, and from everything which is unrighteous or unholy; also from enmity, and hatred, and covetousness, and from every unholy desire..." (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 129). Christians should be constantly encouraged, even entreated, to do and be all these things and more as part of our good works for the Lord.

Conclusion

Jesus told his disciples: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). Although the love of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ is unconditional, he makes it clear that in order for us to abide in his love that we must keep his commandments—thus requiring us to do something. Jesus further illustrates his point by setting the perfect example of keeping his father's commandments and letting us know that by doing so he abides in his father's love.

It is critical that every Christian understand the principle of good works, the role of faith in works, how that relates to our building the kingdom of God, and the effects it has on our own salvation.

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