

WILL CHRISTIANS BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH ALONE? (NO)

Among the many foundational beliefs of Protestantism, perhaps the most unique is its doctrine of *sola fide*, meaning that only faith is sufficient for salvation and good works have no role in that scheme, quoting Romans 3:28, and other scriptural passages in support of this doctrine.

Catholic belief, on the other hand, states that faith and good works are both necessary for salvation, because Christ demands “*faith working through charity*” (Galatians 5:6).

In Matthew 25:31–46, we are told that the Last Judgment will be based on works of charity, and this is in keeping with Mark 12:30–31: “*And ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength’. The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There are no other commandments greater than these.*” Further when the rich young man asked Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life, he answered: “*Keep the commandments*” (Matthew 19:17).

Thus, it is evident that though faith is the beginning of the Christian journey, it is not the complete fulfillment of the will of God.

Very significantly, Jesus himself declared that good works will be rewarded in heaven; “*For the Son of man... will repay every man according to his deeds*” (Matthew 16:27); “*And whoever... gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward*” (Matthew 10:42).

The concept of *sola fide*, in the Bible, is conspicuous by its absence. So how do we understand—“*For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law*”—Romans 3:28? Clearly here St. Paul was only referring to works peculiar to the old Jewish law, as he cited circumcision as an example (Romans 4:10). In fact, he categorically says that neglecting certain types of good works is like denying the faith: “*...if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*” (1Timothy 5:8).

Indeed, he urges us to believe, that “*each will receive his own reward according to his own labor*” (1Corinthians 3:8); “*For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints*” (Hebrews. 6:10).

Still, as Catholics we know that, strictly speaking, God never owes us anything. Even after obeying all God’s commandments, we must still say: “*We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done*” (Luke 17:10).

If faith ruled out the necessity of good works for salvation, would the following words be found in the Bible? “*You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone*” (James

2:24); or, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead”(James2:26); or, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?” (James 2:14).

Salvation will not come if one has faith in Jesus and does evil deeds, nor will it come by good deeds without faith in Jesus, as St. Irenaeus (c. 115–142 AD), the ancient Father of the Church has written: “For what is the use of knowing the truth in word, while defiling the body and accomplishing the works of evil? Or what real good at all can bodily holiness do, if truth be not in the soul? For these two, faith and good works, rejoice in each other’s company, and agree together and fight side by side to set man in the Presence of God...” (from his Proof of the Apostolic Preaching)

And then, very significantly, had St. Paul meant that faith ruled out the necessity of good works for salvation, would he have written: “...and if I should have all faith, so that I could move mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing” (1Corinthians 13:2).

The Catholic doctrine of faith and works necessary for our justification makes us participants in faith in the great works of redemption Jesus authored for all mankind. For by our good works that the Gospel is best evangelized (Matthew 5:14–16).

—END OF THE MAIN ARTICLE—

FURTHER COMMENTS ON "JUSTIFIED BY FAITH ALONE"

The image at the head of this page is adapted from an original Eastern Orthodox icon depicting St Irenaeus of Lyons (also known as St Eirenaïos in Greek). St Irenaeus was the 2nd-century Bishop of Lugdunum (modern-day Lyon, France), a theologian, and early Church Father known for his foundational text in Christian theology—that refutes Gnostic beliefs—“Against Heresies“. He also wrote the treatise “Proof of the Apostolic Preaching.”

The Greek inscription “Ο Άγιος” (Ho Hagios) on the left means “The Saint” and on the right “Ειρηναῖος” (Eirēnaïos). The icon is presented the traditional Byzantine style.

COMMENT

“Salvation will not come if one has faith in Jesus and does evil deeds, nor will it come by good deeds without faith in Jesus”

This statement is quoted from the main article to analyze if this was taught by Early Church Fathers.

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Yes, the statement aligns with teachings found in the writings of several Early Church Fathers, who emphasized that salvation requires both faith in Christ and a life of good works (or avoidance of evil), with neither sufficing on its own. This view reflects a holistic understanding of justification, where faith is the foundation but must be lived out through obedience and righteousness.

While some Protestant interpretations of certain patristic texts argue for “faith alone” (*sola fide*) in a way that separates it from meritorious works, the broader consensus from the Fathers’ writings support the integration of faith and works. Below, are some relevant quotes from key figures, drawn from historical analyses and compilations.

Faith Without Good Works (or With Evil Deeds) Does Not Save

Many Fathers explicitly warned that mere belief or profession of faith, without corresponding righteous living, is insufficient for salvation. This echoes James 2:14-26 in the New Testament, which describes faith without works as “dead.”

St Clement of Rome (c AD 96):

“Let us therefore join with those to whom grace is given by God. Let us clothe ourselves in concord, being humble and self-controlled, keeping ourselves far from all backbiting and slander, being justified by works and not by words... Why was our Father Abraham blessed? Was it not because of his deeds of justice and truth, wrought in faith?... So we, having been called through his will in Christ Jesus, were not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety or works which we wrought in holiness of heart, but through faith, whereby the almighty God justified all men.” (Letter to the Corinthians 30:3, 31:2, 32:3-4).

Here, St. Clement ties justification to faith but illustrates it through Abraham’s works, showing they are inseparable.

Origen (AD 226-232):

“Whoever dies in his sins, even if he professes to believe in Christ, does not truly believe in him; and even if that which exists without works be called faith, such faith is dead in itself, as we read in the epistle bearing the name of James.” (Commentaries on John 19:6).

St Gregory of Nyssa (ca. AD 335-394):

“Paul, joining righteousness to faith and weaving them together, constructs of them the breastplates for the infantryman, armoring the soldier properly and safely on both sides. A soldier cannot be considered safely armored when either shield is disjoined from the other. Faith without works of justice is not sufficient for salvation; neither is righteous living secure in itself of salvation, if it is disjoined from faith.” (Homilies on Ecclesiastes 8).

St John Chrysostom (ca. AD 391):

“He that believes in the Son has everlasting life.’ ‘Is it enough, then, to believe in the Son,’ someone will say, ‘in order to have everlasting life?’ By no means! Listen to Christ declare this himself when he says, ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord! Lord!” shall enter into the kingdom of heaven’; and the blasphemy against the Spirit is alone sufficient to cast him into hell. But why should I speak of a part of our teaching? For if a man believe rightly in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, but does not live rightly, his faith will avail him nothing toward salvation.” (Homilies on the Gospel of John 31:1).

St Chrysostom directly addresses the insufficiency of faith without righteous living.

St Jerome (AD 386):

“But since in the Law no one is justified before God, it is evident that the just man lives by faith.’ It should be noted that he does not say that a man, a person, lives by faith, lest it be thought that he is condemning good works. Rather, he says the ‘just’ man lives by faith. He implies thereby that whoever would be faithful and would conduct his life according to the faith can in no other way arrive at the faith or live in it except first he be a just man of pure life, coming up to the faith by certain degrees.” (Commentaries on Galatians 2:3:11).

Good Works Without Faith Do Not Save

The Fathers also stressed that moral actions or “good deeds” apart from faith in Christ are inadequate, often contrasting this with pre-Christian or pagan efforts at righteousness.

St Theophilus of Antioch (ca. AD 181):

“Give studious attention to the prophetic writings, and they will lead you on a clearer path to escape the eternal punishments and to obtain the eternal good things of God. He who gave the mouth for speech and formed the ears for hearing and made eyes for seeing will examine everything and will judge justly, granting recompense to each according to merit. To those who seek immortality by the patient exercise of good works, he will give everlasting life, joy, peace, rest, and all good things... For the unbelievers and for the contemptuous, and for those who do not submit to the truth but assent to iniquity... there will be wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, and in the end such men as these will be detained in everlasting fire.” (To Autolycus 1:14).

Good works lead to reward only for those who submit to the Truth (Faith in Christ, see John 14:6).

St Clement of Alexandria (post AD 202):

“When we hear, ‘Your faith has saved you,’ we do not understand the Lord to say simply that they will be saved who have believed in whatever manner, even if works have not followed. To begin with, it

was to the Jews alone that he spoke this phrase, who had lived in accord with the law and blamelessly and who had lacked only faith in the Lord.” (Stromateis 6:14:108:4).

This implies that blameless living under the law (good deeds) without faith in Christ falls short.

St Cyprian (AD 252):

Emphasizes purification through almsgiving and works of justice, but frames it within faith in Christ, implying works alone (without Christ’s “*white garment*”) are insufficient. (Works and Almsgiving 14).

Broader Context and Counterarguments

Historical surveys, such as those from Catholic scholars, conclude that the Early Church unanimously rejected a separation of faith from works in salvation.

For instance, a review of patristic literature notes that most Fathers believed “*faith and works must both exist for a person to be a true Christian.*”

This is seen as consistent with New Testament passages like Matthew 7:21 and Galatians 5:6.

However, some Protestant analyses highlight phrases like “*justified by faith alone*” in figures such as Ambrosiaster (ca. AD 366-384), who wrote:

“They are justified freely because they have not done anything nor given anything in return, but by faith alone they have been made holy by the gift of God.” (Commentary on Romans 3:24).

These are often interpreted as excluding “*works of the law*” (Mosaic rituals) rather than all good works, and in full context, even these writers link faith to moral living or “*natural law.*”

We can argue such readings impose 16th-century Reformation categories on earlier texts, where “*sola fide*” typically meant faith apart from Jewish law, not apart from Christian obedience (John 14:15).

In summary, the statement at the beginning of this comment can indeed be substantiated from the Early Church Fathers, as their writings consistently portray salvation as a process involving both faith in Jesus and a transformed life of good deeds. For deeper study, primary sources like the Ante-Nicene Fathers collections are recommended.

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