

Faith, Works and Eternal Salvation

[Roger's Note: This sounds like my beliefs throughout and yet I don't remember writing it. Some aspects of it don't sound like my writing even though I agree with the writer. I cannot therefore take credit for this even though you may assume that it is what I believe.]

I don't know how wide-spread the debate is, but there is some discussion among various segments of Christianity as to the relationship between faith and works and their consequent relationship to salvation. The discussion centers around questions such as these:

- Does salvation result from faith alone or are works a required part of the mix?
- Is salvation secure or can it be lost by neglect or willful disobedience?
- Does the new birth include a change in desire and motivation?

This short discussion and analysis is not designed to be an exhaustive study of the subject, but only provide seed thoughts for further study and discussion. All scripture references are from the New King James Bible.

Nature and Source of Salvation

Many of the questions and answers given by people discussing this subject have underlying assumptions about the nature and source of salvation. If these assumptions are incorrect, the questions as well as the answers may miss the mark.

The Bible teaches that salvation is of God and is an expression of the new covenant.

As part of the rebirth process under the New Covenant, God promises a new spirit as well as a new heart. The motivations of the New Heart will be toward God. There is a change in a person's life that is different than merely changing ones mind about God or Christ.

²⁶“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. Ez 36:26

This same idea is repeated in 2Corinthians 5:17 ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The Bible clearly teaches that the new birth is of God by the will of God and not by the will of man.

¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12,13

The following passage in I John demonstrates the dramatic nature of the new birth. The point here is two-fold. First, it confirms the statements of those who emphatically state that works are a natural result of salvation. Righteous people practice righteousness. I have no argument with that. The other point here though is that someone born of God does not practice sin. Sin is not a characteristic pattern of those who are born again. Therefore a person who is saved will not be lost even if it were possible because a born again person will not live a life of sin because it is not in their nature and therefore they would not transgress far enough to lose their salvation.

⁴Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ⁵And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. ⁶Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. ⁸He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. ⁹Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

The Bible teaches that God grants the graces of faith and repentance.

²⁵in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, II Tim 2:25

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast. Eph 2:8-9

author and finisher of our faith.

It is God who causes one to stand and it is God who is at work not only in the doing but in the willing in our lives.

⁴Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. Rom 14:4

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Phil 2:12, 13

Part of the confusion and disagreement that arises in this discussion I believe comes from mixing the viewpoint from God's perspective with that from man's point of view. We are called upon to repent and believe the Gospel. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. These are from the viewpoint of man. From God's point of view He is providing the faith and repentance needed for salvation. Not all men have faith. ([reference](#))

Faith and Works

Scripture teaches that we are justified by faith alone. There are several kinds of faith but there is only one kind of saving faith. An example of non-saving faith occurs in John 8.

³⁰As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. ³¹Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³²“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” ³³They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* you say, ‘You will be made free?’” ³⁴Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵“And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever. ³⁶“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. ³⁷“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. ³⁸“I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.” ³⁹They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. ⁴⁰“But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. ⁴¹“You do the deeds of your father.” Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.” ⁴²Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. ⁴³“Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. ⁴⁴“You are of *your* father the devil,

The Bible says many of the Jews believed on Christ. That’s not what the Jews said, that is what the Bible says. And yet the successive discussion shows that they were of their father the devil and were not truly saved. I doubt that they thought they were saved – at least by faith in Christ. James tells us that the demons believe and they tremble. It could hardly be said that they were saved even though they believe. Because these false faiths are out there, James clarifies the matter when he says, faith without works is dead.

True saving faith comes from God and is a result of the new birth. In the New Covenant, God gives a heart with God’s law written on it and God causes recipients of the new covenant to walk in his ways. God is at work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Romans 8:3,4 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Much of the concern on the part of those who strongly emphasize works with faith, is a result of an “easy believism” that permeates the modern church. Real faith and professing belief are two different things. Not everyone who raises a hand, goes forward, makes a profession, is baptized, takes communion or joins a church has true faith. It’s possible to call Jesus Lord and do wonders in His name and still not have saving faith. The concern of our Christian brethren in other denominations who look at what is going on is often justified. At the same time, the careless use of biblical teaching does not mean the teaching itself is wrong.

Salvation is a result of faith alone. Works naturally flow from it. Just as it is possible to have a professing faith without works, it is possible to have the works without the faith. Works are an evidence of faith, but works do not save us and works do not keep us saved. It might be possible to look at our works to see if there are any so that we can examine ourselves to see if we are in

the faith. There are inherent dangers in this approach in that we may begin to generate works on our own in order to try to convince ourselves that we have faith when there actually is none.

Certainty of Salvation

It seems clear to me that the Bible teaches it is possible to know one is born again. The following verses seem to teach this:

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,

²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith

II Peter 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

I John 1:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God.

John says he wrote these things so that we may know that we have eternal life – here and now. We know we have eternal life, not because we are so faithful in performing, but because God is faithful in what He has promised in His word.

Eternal Salvation

The doctrine of “Perseverance of the Saints” or “Eternal Security” comes under attack because of the careless use of these doctrines by well-meaning Christians. Some from our circles have gone so far as to say that you can be saved no matter what you do or how badly you fall into a life of sin. Such a teaching is not Scriptural. But Scripture does teach that a person who is saved is saved forever. How can we teach this without giving occasion for people to take the salvation and live a godless life knowing they’re secure?

There are several important considerations. First, the truth that salvation is of God. We already discussed this in the first section. God is the one who sought and found. God is the one who opened our hearts to the gospel. God is the one who granted faith and repentance. God is also the one who keeps.

⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ; Phil 1:6

Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. Rom 14:4

John 17:11, 12

¹¹“Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We *are*.”

¹²“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

²⁶“But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. John 10:26

³⁷“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹“This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:37-40

Neither life nor death can separate us from the love of God.

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? *It is* God who justifies. ³⁴Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

³⁷Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

²⁵Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Heb 7:25

Yes, say they, but in these last two verses it says that nothing else can remove us, but we could remove ourselves either by an outright decision or by carelessness on our part. The problem with this is that this view denies the supernatural source and initiative of salvation in the first place. If it was a decision on my part, then later I can decide to quit. But coming to Christ for salvation is not like turning from being a democrat to a republican or from a baseball fan to a football fan. It is not a matter of being convinced in our minds that a particular position is true. It is a result of the transforming power of God on the soul. We are new creatures, have a changed heart with new motivations, interests and desires. A person with those changes in heart will not stray and

neglect his soul. God will make him stand. God will preserve him. God will even discipline him so that he won't be condemned with the world.

A second problem with the position that we can remove ourselves from his hand is that Romans 8 says that nothing present and nothing to come nor any created thing will be able to separate us. I and my decisions are certainly included in the things present, things to come and created things. Also, notice in John 10 that the passage doesn't just speak of what might or might not be able to take us out of His hand. It says "they shall never perish, neither shall anyone take them out of his hand." The passage in John 6 tells us that it is God's will that all He has given to the son will be raised up on the last day. And certainly Jesus is not going to fail in fulfilling the will of God. He goes on to say that it is the will of God that everyone who sees and believes in the Son of God will have everlasting life and will be raised up on the last day.

I Peter 1:3ff says Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Ephesians 1:13, 14 In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

The word guarantee in the preceding verse is the old word "earnest". An earnest is a down payment. The idea is that a down payment is lost to the owner if the contract is not honored. God is using very strong language in this passage to explain how secure our salvation is. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit. That in and of itself should be sufficient to assure our hearts, but verse 14 goes on to say that the Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance – not until we sin too much, but until the redemption of the purchased possession. We are the purchased position and our final redemption has not yet fully been completed until resurrection day. But God has given us a down payment. The down payment is the guarantee that God will follow through on the remainder of what He has promised. The expression is so strong that it implies that if God fails to follow through on His end of the bargain, we get to keep the Holy Spirit no matter where we end up for eternity.

It is the power of God that keeps us through faith for salvation.

Some argue that this teaching allows for the idea that people can live anyway they want and still claim to be saved. First of all, anyone can say anything about their faith or their salvation and that doesn't mean they have it. Secondly, the nonpossibility of falling is not in a vacuum. God uses all means to accomplish His ends. These means include warnings which true believers will heed. These are true warnings which are part of the means God uses to keep prevent a Christian's being lost.

Consider the story of the Paul's shipwreck.

²²“And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³“For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, ²⁴“saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ ²⁵“Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. Acts 27:22 ff

³⁰And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, ³¹Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.”

When you read this story you see that Paul clearly states that no one on the boat will perish. This is comparable to God’s statement that “they shall never perish.” Later on he tells them that if they don’t stay with the boat they will perish. If these people had been modern thinkers they would have seen the contradiction in these two statements. But both statements were true. God promised to save everyone. And he did. Yet he saved them by giving them a warning that they heeded. We could ask the “what if” question. What if they had gotten off the boat? Which promise would have been in effect – the one that said all would be saved or the one that said they would die if they left the ship? It’s a moot point. They were saved because of the promise of God and because they heeded the warnings. The promises were true and trustworthy and the warnings were not invalid.

Let me use an actual example of how these things are being discussed. These excerpts come from the following Anabaptist website: <http://www.anabaptists.org/writings/secure.html>. I give you the link so that you can verify my quotes and check further into their discussion. The information in the website is attributed to Mark Roth. I have never met Mark and the purpose of this analysis is not to be argumentative, but to explore the scriptures so that all of us can do what the Bereans were praised for: They searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

I’m not quoting Mr. Roth’s first several points because I agree with them completely and they don’t add anything to this current discussion. If you go to the website listed above and find that I left out other comments from Mr. Roth, it is not to dilute the argument but that I am in agreement with those points.

The Scriptures are written in brown. Mr. Roth’s comments follow preceded by “Roth”.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

Roth: To be delivered from condemnation we must *walk* after the Spirit. That is a trait of those who truly are in Christ Jesus. And we cannot possibly walk after the Spirit without doing the works of the Spirit.

I agree generally with the fact that this is a trait of those who truly are in Christ Jesus. Walking after the Spirit certainly does produce the works and fruit of the spirit working themselves out in the Christian. I just want to point out that this is speaking of all true Christians. There are some people who say these are spiritual Christians in distinction from non-spiritual Christians who are

not walking after the Spirit. But it is obvious from this chapter in Romans that those who are not after the Spirit are not truly believers.

"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Roth: Paul realized that even he could reach the end of his life and discover himself among those rejected by God.

The word castaway here means set on the shelf and not lost salvation and rejection by God.

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Roth: Will His blood have that cleansing effect if we do not walk in the light?

Certainly not. But then not walking in the light is a sign of lostness.

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Roth: A faith not expressed by works is ineffective and will fail to bring about the completion of justification.

A faith not expressed by works is one of the non-saving faiths I spoke about earlier. There is no disagreement here. The problem is I think that we sometimes give too much credence to people who say they have faith. When I speak of faith, I am always speaking of the kind of faith that saves. Not having saving faith will not only fail to bring about the completion of justification, it will fail to bring about the beginning of justification.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Roth: Following Jesus is a progression of daily events, not a single decision.

I think this statement comes from the concern over those who teach decisional salvation. There is a fine line here. If we focus on the decision we risk giving the impression that everything rests in that one moment and no change in life is necessary and no evidence is necessary. I share those same concerns. But at the same time, I think it is certainly true that the Bible teaches that there is a coming to Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. The jailor was being told what to do at that moment in time. There is a moment before which we are lost and after which we are saved. Obviously that believing should continue and as I explained earlier it will continue, because it is God who works in you both the willing and the doing of his good pleasure.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Ephesians 1:4).

Roth: We have been chosen for a purpose. Shall we dare oblige God to keep us among His chosen even if our lives cease to fulfill that sacred purpose?

I agree with the first sentence. But what is the basis for the question? Who dares oblige God to keep us among the chosen even if our lives cease to fulfill this purpose? God has chosen them to be holy. That is his work and he will accomplish that by His transforming power. It is God's purpose, as the following passage shows, that we partake in his holiness. His discipline is designed to accomplish this in the lives of His children.

Heb 12:7

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹²Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed. ¹⁴Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

Mr. Roth then gives some questions and his answers to them.

What about "Once a son, always a son; you cannot be unborn"?

Roth: The issue isn't being unborn; the issue is dying. As long as the believer is spiritually alive, he can rest secure in the eternal integrity of his relationship with Christ. Despite such a solid tie, if I die spiritually, my oneness with Christ is lost.

Roth: Contemporary Christianity reacts with horror and condemnation at the notion of God disinheriting someone. They point to the reality of human biological parenthood to establish that nobody can be unborn spiritually. They overlook at least two things -- my sonship to my parents was not my choice and it is not dependent on my submission to them. My sonship to God is based on an entirely different premise -- I chose to submit to Him and thus became His son.

Roth: Even if Dad's will states me as the recipient of a \$5,000 inheritance, I cannot collect it if I die before he does. Did I have to be "unborn" to not collect my inheritance? No, I just had to die. So it is spiritually. If we die spiritually, how can we expect to inherit eternal life?

Where is the Scriptural evidence that it is possible to die spiritually? This is eternal life – a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. How can oneness with Christ be lost? We are members of his flesh and of his bones? Can part of Christ die? Mr. Roth says that my sonship to my parents was not my choice, but my sonship to God is because I chose. I discussed this earlier, but John 1:13 specifically says we are not born of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

God does not disinherit someone. The whole purpose of the second covenant compared to the first is that God himself has promised to be the solution. What the law could not do, God did.

So every time I sin, I'm lost?

Roth: I think not. To sin is not to die spiritually (although sin not dealt with Biblically does pose a threat to our spiritual life). However, if I return to a *life* of sin, then I am spiritually dead. Then I am lost and need to be redeemed again.

But doesn't returning to a life of sin mean someone was never saved?

Roth: No, but that's what many a Calvinist has to say. To me that seems like real insecurity! You see, only the presumptuous would pretend to know *now* that he won't fall away in five years. If you were to fall then, are you saved now?! Therefore, it seems to me that the Calvinist can't possibly be secure now. It also seems the Calvinist really can't know till life's end whether he is saved or not. Then it's too late to do anything about it.

I assume deal Biblically means confession. How do we know what sins to confess? Which sins put us in danger of dying spiritually and which ones don't? Most of the time we focus on a few sins that we consider important – sins such as adultery, lying, etc. But to think that our sin problem is limited to ten or twenty specific sins is to minimize the problem. What about a root of bitterness, or a lack of loving my neighbor as myself? What about coveting a neighbor's sports car or job or personality? What about the command to pray without ceasing or rejoice evermore? What about doing all things without murmuring and disputing? How do I know if I've loved enough or rejoiced enough? What if I don't remember to confess for them all? Is a blanket confession sufficient? If so, doesn't that trivialize all of the sins of the day or week that I'm confessing?

I can have confidence that God will keep me. It would be presumption if I were depending upon myself. I can't even stand a day. But God can keep me forever. He saves to the uttermost those who come unto God by Him.

What does Mr. Roth mean by redeemed again. Christ's sacrifice was a once-for-all redemption. To be redeemed again would require another sacrifice and that is specifically what Hebrews 10? is speaking against. If this passage in Hebrews is talking about spiritual death or losing ones salvation, it is clear that repentance will not bring a person back. There is no hope if one rejects the only hope of salvation.

Doesn't your position also produce insecurity?

Roth: I see my teaching as underscoring the understanding, mercy, and grace of God. Faith without works is intangible and fickle, terribly reliant of feelings. God knows and understands that. Not wanting us to struggle with that kind of insecurity, He mercifully established works as the unavoidable result and proof of saving faith. Isn't He gracious?! We have something tangible to assure our hearts that both we and our eternal inheritance are secure.

Roth: Let's remember, though, that we can no more safely separate our works from our faith than we can safely separate our faith from our works. Neither can stand alone.

Faith without works isn't intangible and fickle. Faith without works is dead. It isn't a matter of God not wanting us to deal with the insecurity of faith with no works. He doesn't want us to have faith with no works because it isn't true faith. It has nothing to do with being fickle or insecure. There are no Christians living in the insecurity of faith with no works. Individuals in that position are not saved and never have been. Once they are saved by the power and grace of God they will be a new creature and since they are born of God, they will not continue to sin.

Doesn't your position mean that Christ's sacrifice was not enough?

Roth: No, it doesn't mean that at all.

Roth: The Bible's position is that mere faith in Christ's sacrifice is not enough. The Bible teaches clearly that saving faith produces -- and needs -- good works.

As I wrote someplace earlier, if a person's works are "required" to keep him saved then Christ's salvation was not sufficient. Scripture clearly teaches that we are justified by faith. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the Christian. There are works accompanying that faith, but these works don't merit anything from God. They don't earn our salvation and they don't merit our keeping. They only give evidence of the salvation that we have. God's power and His justifying grace are sufficient to save and keep. I'm not sure what Mr. Roth means by "mere faith" in Christ's sacrifice is not enough. True biblical faith should never be characterized as "mere" and if it is not biblical faith, it doesn't deserve the name "faith".