



Ask, Father James:

Is “Faith” Alone Enough to Save Us?”

Some 500 years ago, the rebel monk, Martin Luther, led the Protestant Revolution against the Catholic Church and one of the points he adduced for the revolution was that salvation is by faith alone - *sola fide*. Luther had erroneously inserted the word 'alone' [*solum*] to 'faith' in his reading of Romans 3:28; the word “alone” was not in the text.

His 1522 thesis stated that we are justified by faith alone in Christ without any works of the law. The Catholics have always maintained the biblical truth that faith plus love of God and neighbour propels us to do good. Like St Paul says; Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). In the Bible, James wrote that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). The Catholic doctrine has always been that faith and Good works are necessary for salvation. We are not saved by works alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) but a genuine faith should produce works, otherwise it's not really faith. As Christians, we are called to both and the righteous should live by faith and that faith will produce good works (Romans 1:17). Catholics believe that “good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened.

The monk, Martin Luther was teaching that, human beings are incapable of cooperating in their salvation, because as sinners they actively oppose God and his saving action” but Catholic teaching say that persons ‘cooperate’ in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God’s justifying action. Luther disagreed and broke away from both the church’s sacramental system and the supreme authority of the church - papal hierarchy. In 1521 before the Diet of Worms, a papal council, where Luther was invited to recant, but he refused. He said; "I CANNOT and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand, may God help me."

This was the situation until the signing of a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Catholics and the Lutherans in 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. And in March 2019, three other churches of the Christian world communion – (Anglicans, Methodists and Reformed) signed to join the agreement. By the signing of the declaration, the Roman Catholic Church and these churches publicly and bindingly stated that, through this consensus, all the parties recognize the need for good works—not good works through our own autonomous power, but only as empowered and inspired by divine grace. This joint declaration effectively resolves one of the key theological conflicts of the Protestant Revolution.

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