

A Gross Misapplication

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The following words from the apostle Paul may be among the most frequently abused and misused in Scripture: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9). The abuse occurs when one uses this passage as if it were the only statement of Scripture on the subject of salvation. Other passages state other/additional conditions of salvation, however.

Those who advocate the *faith-only* doctrine relating to salvation (i.e., that God forgives and saves one the moment he believes in Jesus as God’s Son) often quote Paul’s statement above as their “proof text.” However, this very passage refutes their *faith-only* doctrine. Note that it requires not only the **heart**-action of **belief**, but also the **mouth**-action of **confession** of that faith (obviously, not “faith alone”). The New Testament contains not a single statement to the effect that salvation occurs the moment one merely believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The one passage in which *faith only* appears (Jam. 2:24), declares that one **cannot** be justified/saved thereby. Rather, the New Testament makes many statements to the contrary.

One would obviously be in grave error to deny that sinners are saved by faith. Many verses of Scripture thus affirm (e.g., John 3:16; Acts 16: 31; Rom. 5:1; et al.), but not one of them has the word *only* or *alone* in connection with *faith*. The *faith-alone-for-salvation* doctrine is too recent—by several centuries—to be inspired or apostolic. It came out of the 16th-century attempts of Martin Luther to reform the Roman Catholic Church. In his Scriptural (and thus correct) rejection of the Roman church’s system of seeking salvation through a maze of human works devised by men, Luther swung to the opposite, equally damnable, extreme. Each time he read in the New Testament that salvation is “by faith,” he interpreted “by faith alone”; his doctrine wears the historic Latin name of *sola fide*—solely by faith.

Those who promote Romans 10:9 (or any other single verse) as the totality of teaching on the terms of pardon create contradictions between the inspired men, including with the Lord. A principal rule of Biblical hermeneutics (i.e., interpretation) is that any interpretation of a passage that contradicts other passages cannot be correct. To state it another way, the Scriptures must be so interpreted as to harmonize throughout. One has a very low opinion of the Bible if he is not concerned that his view of passage “A” directly contradicts passage “B.” If Paul taught *faith-only* salvation in Romans 10:9 (or anywhere else), he contradicted:

- Ananias, who baptized him (Acts 22:12–16)
- Himself (Acts 17:30; Rom. 6:3–4, 17–19; Gal. 3:27)

- Peter (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21)
- The Son of God (Mat. 7:21–23; 10:32; Luke 13:3; Mark 16:16)

A synopsis of the foregoing passages (plus the detailed accounts of conversion in Acts) reveals that an oral confession of faith in the Christ, repentance of sins, and baptism in water are all conditions of Divine pardon. The Scriptures no more teach *faith-only* salvation than they do *repentance-only* or *baptism-only* salvation.

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