



The Armor of Faith

Topic Summary: The Importance of Faith and Works – Part I *Do Works Matter?*



Faith, Hope, and Charity
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Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Our panelists provide support and catechesis for religious formation at St. Philip Benizi Catholic Mission in Cedaredge CO. Our panelists are also in the process of discernment and study to become lay Dominicans who are also known as the Order of Preachers. So, welcome to our panelists as well as our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray.

Discussion:

A major criticism leveled against Catholic doctrine is that while we do not believe our **works** can buy our way into heaven, our **works** do matter. There are those who profess that we are saved by **faith** and **faith** alone, for no matter our sin, our place in heaven was purchased for us from upon the cross and the sacrifice made for us by the only begotten Son of God, Jesus.

The issue begins with what is stated in John 3:16, which says, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.*”

So, there it is, at first glance, all it appears we need do to secure eternal life is stand and profess, "I believe in the Son of God." There seems to be no other conditions stated here, only that our **belief** in Him shall yield to us eternal life. We also see a similar thought in Romans 3:27-28, where St Paul writes:

*"27 What occasion is there then for boasting? It is ruled out. On what principle, that of works? No, rather on the principle of **faith**. 28 For we consider that a person is justified by **faith** apart from works of the law.*

In Galatians 2:21, Saint Paul writes,

*"I do not nullify the grace of God; for **if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.**" (Galatians 2:21)*

Saint Paul also writes in Ephesians 2:4-7,

*4 But God, who is rich in mercy, **because of the great love he had for us,** 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)*

As we examine scripture such as this, it is easy to see why some think works are inconsequential to our day of judgment. I think we can all agree that our salvation comes through the grace of God and is not something we can purchase through any means of wealth or works of our own, for if we are to have a place in heaven, we must understand that it was purchased for us through the sacrifice made for us from upon the cross.

Still, if we are saved by faith and faith alone, one might ask what is the purpose of the day of judgment and by what shall we be judged; only by what we profess by our lips?

In this discussion, we are somewhat at the mercy of understanding what "**belief**" and "**faith**" truly means. Part of the Merriam-Webster definition of faith reads, "**belief** and trust in and loyalty to God." Part of the definition of **belief** is, "something that is accepted, considered to be true, or held as an opinion." Of course, we might ask the question, do not the fallen angels and demons also know and **believe** in the Son of God? So, is there something beyond the mere confession of our lips which shall determine our eternal place after we pass from this world?

As we stated in previous discussions, looking to a few segments of scripture in isolation from the larger context by which to understand what God asks of us may cause us to miss the larger picture.

(Question: So, let us keep this in mind as we begin our discussion today and open with the question, **what is the importance of faith to our salvation?**)

So, let's look at John 3:16 in a slightly greater context, in other words, what comes before and after the verse.

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who **believes** in him may have eternal life.” 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who **believes** in him might not perish but might have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever **believes** in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not **believed** in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their **works** were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. 21 But whoever lives the **truth** comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God. (John 3:14-21)

(**Question:** If we look at the larger context of what surrounds John 3:16, we see two key words, “**belief**” and “**works**.” The main focus is that those who “**believe**,” or in other words, have **faith** in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. What does our **belief** in Him really mean and how do our choices in life demonstrate that **belief**?)

Let's look a little further:

Whoever **believes** in the Son has eternal life, but whoever **disobeys** the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him. (John 3:36)

(**Question:** The statement here, clearly demonstrates that whoever **believes** in the Son has eternal life, but there is a “but,” here. What are we to discern from what comes after the “but” word? What does the word, “**disobey**” imply?)

So, let's jump ahead a bit to John 12.

44 Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever **believes** in me **believes** not only in me but also in the one who sent me, 45 and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me. 46 I came into the world as light, so that everyone who **believes** in me might not remain in darkness. 47 And if anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. 48 Whoever **rejects** me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: the word that I spoke, it will condemn him on the last day, 49 because I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. So what I say, I say as the Father told me.” (John 12:44-50)

(**Question:** Jesus states in John 12:50, “I know that his commandment is eternal life.” While it is a commandment, just as with the other commandments, there is a choice. What is this choice and what does this commandment mean to us?)

I Therefore, you are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgment. For by the standard by which you judge another you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the very same things. 2 We know that the judgment of God on those who do such things is true. 3 Do you suppose, then, you who judge those who engage in such things and yet do them yourself, that

you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you hold his priceless kindness, forbearance, and patience in low esteem, unaware that the kindness of God would lead you to repentance? 5 By your stubbornness and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself for the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, 6 who will repay everyone according to his works: 7 eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works, 8 but wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. 9 Yes, affliction and distress will come upon every human being who does evil, Jew first and then Greek. 10 But there will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, Jew first and then Greek. 11 There is no partiality with God. (Romans 2:1-11)

(Question: Here we see a theme also reflected in Matthew 7:1-5, where we are called not to judge, for as we judge, so will we be judged, and the measure with which we measure will be measured out to us. (Matthew 7:2) So if the act of judging carries a consequence, what does that mean for other deeds we are told we should not do?)

(Question: Here, Saint Paul asks, “Or do you hold his priceless kindness, for bearance, and patience in low esteem, unaware that the kindness of God would lead you to repentance?” What might Saint Paul be bringing to our attention here?)

Let's jump backwards a bit.

1 Thus says the LORD: Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and there deliver this word: 2 You shall say: Listen to the word of the LORD, king of Judah, who sit on the throne of David, you, your ministers, and your people who enter by these gates! 3 Thus says the LORD: Do what is right and just. Rescue the victims from the hand of their oppressors. Do not wrong or oppress the resident alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. 4 If you carry out these commands, kings who succeed to the throne of David will continue to enter the gates of this house, riding in chariots or mounted on horses, with their ministers, and their people. 5 But if you do not obey these commands, I swear by myself—oracle of the LORD: this house shall become rubble. (Jeremiah 22:1-5)

The scripture continues:

8 Many nations will pass by this city and ask one another: “Why has the LORD done this to so great a city?” 9 And they will be told: “Because they have deserted their covenant with the LORD, their God, by worshiping and serving other gods.” (Jeremiah 22:8-9)

Jeremiah continues with examples of kings and that which comes from them.

13 Woe to him who builds his house on wrongdoing, his roof-chambers on injustice; Who works his neighbors without pay, and gives them no wages. 14 Who says, “I will build myself a spacious house, with airy rooms,” Who cuts out windows for it, panels it with cedar, and paints it with vermilion. 15 Must you prove your rank among kings by competing with them in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, And act justly and righteously? Then he prospered. 16 Because he dispensed justice to the weak and the poor, he prospered. Is this not to know me—oracle of the LORD. 17 But your eyes and heart are set on nothing except your own gain, On shedding innocent blood and practicing oppression and extortion. (Jeremiah 22:13-17)

Then the prophecy reveals what shall be the future of such a king.

18 Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah: **They shall not lament him,** “Alas! my brother”; “Alas! Sister.” They shall not lament him, “Alas, Lord! alas, Majesty!” 19 **The burial of a donkey he shall be given, dragged forth and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.** (Jeremiah 22:18-19)

(Question: We see to what the kings are called, how they are expected to rule and lead the people, as well as the warning to those who ignore this call. **What was the outcome for the evil king and what message is there for us in this example?)**

(Observation: Of course, there are those who might point out this example only talks about the consequences of misconduct in this life, but it does not really reveal the consequence which may await this king on the day of judgment. So, let's examine further.)

21 **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.** 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? **Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’** 23 Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

(Question: Here, we see the statement, *Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.* This is a strong message for those who profess their **faith** in the Lord. Indeed, they ask, did we not prophesy, drive out demons and do mighty **deeds** in Your name? **If someone has done all these things, for what reason might they be turned away from the gates of heaven?)**

1 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They do not wash [their] hands when they eat a meal.” 3 He said to them in reply, **“And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”** 4 For God said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘Whoever curses father or mother shall die.’ 5 But you say, ‘Whoever says to father or mother, “Any support you might have had from me is dedicated to God,” 6 need not honor his father.’ You have nullified the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 **Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you when he said: 8 ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.’**” (Matthew 15:1-9)

(Question: Here, we see a question of law directed to Jesus. His reply is to the effect of why do you challenge the failure to follow a rather minor law when you fail to follow a rather major commandment? **What lesson should we draw from this exchange?)**

31 **“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, 32 and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the**

world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' 40 And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' 41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' 44 Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' 45 He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' 46 And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the **righteous** to eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46)

(Question: Here, we see a judgment and a separation. What is the criteria of judgment applied to determine this separation and what is the consequence?)

[Jesus said] "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

*Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever **believes** in me will do the **works** that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.* (John 14:12)

*Children, let us love not in **word** or speech but in **deed** and truth.* (1 John 3:18)

21 Beloved, if [our] hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God 22 and receive from him whatever we ask, because we **keep his commandments** and **do what pleases him**. 23 And his commandment is this: we should **believe** in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. 24 **Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit that he gave us.** (1 John 3:21-24)

24 **Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.** 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. 26 **And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand.** 27 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. **And it collapsed and was completely ruined.**" (Matthew 7:24-27)

34 I give you a new commandment: **love** one another. As I have **loved** you, so you also should **love** one another. 35 **This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**" (John 13:34-35)

So, we see in these segments of scripture, what we do and what we fail to do will have a role in the judgment rendered on our last day. This brings up more questions, but given we are close to the end of our time, we will need to continue this discussion.

Quotes:

Take care, then, to be firmly grounded in the teachings of the Lord and his apostles so that you may prosper in all your **doings** both in body and in soul, in **faith** and in love, in the Son, and in the Father and in the Spirit, in the beginning and in the end, along with your most worthy bishop and his spiritual crown, your presbyters, and with the deacons, who are men of God.

– St. Ignatius of Antioch

Girded with **faith** and the performance of good **works**, let us follow in his [Jesus] paths by the guidance of the Gospel.

– Saint Benedict

It is not the actual **physical exertion** that counts towards one's progress, nor the nature of the **task**, but by the spirit of **faith** with which it is undertaken.

– Saint Francis Xavier

"You may know all the commandments, all the prophesies, all the truths of the **faith**, but if this isn't put into **practice**, is not translated into **works**, it serves nothing."

– Pope Francis

Final Thoughts: I think we can see by the examination of scripture that works are important to the demonstration of our faith. Still, there is more to the story, so, as I mentioned we will continue the discussion, but let me point out that faith is not a mere matter of the knowledge of scripture or the sport of debate which parses the meaning of words, although study and discussion are important to our comprehension. Indeed, I believe that in such debates, we often misuse scripture to achieve our personal agendas rather than as a means to share the values of our Creator by which we should evaluate our choices and make our daily decisions. In other words, we may gain knowledge by our study, but it means nothing if through our learning we are not able to apply it and put it into practice.

Wrap Up: Well, as we grow older, an hour seems to go by all the more quicker. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we pick up our discussion with the question, if works matter, what does that mean to us?

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: The Importance of Faith and Works – Part II: If Works Matter, What Does That Mean to Us?