

I am responding to a polite gentleman named David who posted a comment on my blog. He was responding as a kind Protestant who was reacting to my article "[Response to a Southern Baptist.](#)" He is kind and well-spoken and I wish we could sit and have a cup of coffee together to discuss this more personally. I have responded only briefly and with a few random thoughts while on the run. I would suggest he and others read a new book by Steve Wood entitled, [Grace & Justification: An Evangelical's Guide to Catholic Beliefs.](#)

David's words are italicized and in *blue*; my words are in regular text and in black:
Steve's opening thoughts in preparation to respond:

I would like to make two opening comments which are touched on only briefly below. First, the argument about "faith vs. works" has been twisted by Luther and subsequent Protestants into a Protestant vs. Catholic debate. However, Paul never intended that in his letters. There was no Protestant vs. Catholic debate — it was rather a Jew vs. Gentile. Works of the law were not required of Gentiles to become followers of the Jewish Messiah. Only faith like that of Abraham was required.

Second, Catholics are often accused of believing works is what saves us. This is not the case. It is the grace of God through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus that saves us, though we believe we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit to bring that justification-sanctification to its heavenly fulfillment. Jesus does not say those with faith alone will be resurrected and saved, rather he says, John 5:28–29 "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." I am always amazed how the words of Jesus are set aside in preference to a poor interpretation of the words of St Paul.

David starts:

I believe that Evangelicals rightly emphasize that we are saved by grace through faith alone. We are saved by trusting in what Jesus did on the cross and not by earning our salvation by doing a list of required good works. This is taught

throughout the New Testament and is especially clear in Ephesians 2:8-9. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.” This clearly says that we are saved by faith in God’s grace, not by our works. We don’t earn our salvation. Grace is a free gift; but we must receive it by faith. Faith is a combination of believing and trusting in what Jesus did.

STEVE: You are correct. And we Catholics believe the same. No one will stand before God and say, “You OWE me because of my good works!” Initial salvation or justification is a free gift of God based on the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross which is received through faith and baptism. Ephesians 2:8-9 is central to Catholic teaching. Of course, Protestants and uneducated Catholics often misrepresent Catholic teaching, as did Luther, by saying we Catholics think we get saved by our works. This is a sad misrepresentation. Remember, Catholics have been around for 2,000 years and have built their whole theology on Scripture and they were quite aware of Ephesians 2:8-9. But they were also aware of Ephesians 2:10.

A “bible alone” Christian has to be a bit wary in his terminology. First, the Bible never teaches Bible Alone. That is a Martin Luther tradition. Second, Paul never says we are saved by faith alone, whereas James specifically says we are not saved by faith alone.

DAVID: Catholics often make the argument that James supposedly teaches that we are not saved by faith alone, but by faith and works. This is total misunderstanding of what James teaches. James 2:14-26 is not talking about whether we are saved by faith alone, or by faith plus works. On the contrary, James is describing the difference between a faith that is alive and a faith that is dead. Alive faith is proven to be alive by what it does (good works). Dead faith is demonstrated to be dead by what it lacks in action (no works). The whole focus on whether someone’s faith is alive or dead.

STEVE: Yet, this is the only place in the Bible where the words “faith” and “alone” are used together. It is why Luther rejected this book, but can you imagine how

much he would have loved the book if James had eliminated the word “not” in James 2:24.

But to your point, you say “Catholics often....” These are Catholics who either don’t know their faith or who are explaining it without nuances. We are not saved by our works. Like I said, initial justification is by faith and baptism. Following initial justification, justification is continued and realized in faith and works. Even the fact that Protestants emphasize works as a sign or proof of justification demonstrates that even for Protestants works are necessary.

Catholics believe that initial justification is given freely by faith. But we also recognize the rest of Scripture which tells us other things are also necessary for salvation. For example on page 100 of my book Crossing the Tiber: Evangelical Protestants Discover the Historic Church, I provide these paragraphs and this list:

STEVE QUOTING FROM HIS BOOK: “One last comment, even though it will be discussed in more detail later: there is no attempt here to pit baptism against faith, or belief against baptism. Things are rarely that simple. Faith and baptism are two sides of the same coin. Are we saved by faith or by baptism? Are we saved by believing or by the Spirit? These are false dichotomies that should have no place in our thinking.

“How does one receive salvation, justification, new birth, and eternal life?

By believing in Christ (Jn 3:16; Acts 16:31)?

By repentance (Acts 2:38; 2 Pet 3:9)?

By baptism (Jn 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21; Titus 3:5)?

By the work of the Spirit (Jn 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6)?

By declaring with our mouths (Lk 12:8; Rom 10:9)?

By coming to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4; Heb 10:26)?

By works (Rom 2:6, 7; James 2:24)?

By grace (Acts 15:11; Eph 2:8)?

By his blood (Rom 5:9; Heb 9:22)?

By his righteousness (Rom 5:17; 2 Pet 1:1)?

By his Cross (Eph 2:16; Col 2:14)?

By perseverance (Matt 10:22; Col 1:22-23)

“Can we cut any one of these out of the list and proclaim it alone as the means of salvation? Can we be saved without faith? without God’s grace? without repentance? without baptism? without the Spirit? These are all involved and necessary; not one of them can be dismissed as a means of obtaining eternal life. Neither can one be emphasized to the exclusion of another. They are all involved in salvation and entry into the Church. The Catholic Church does not divide these various elements of salvation up, overemphasizing some while ignoring others; rather, she holds them all in their fullness.” (Stephen K. Ray, Crossing the Tiber: Evangelical Protestants Discover the Historical Church (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 100–101.)” BOOK QUOTE ENDED.

STEVE CONTINUES: Notice too that Abraham had righteousness was accounted to him based on his faith, but in Psalm 106:31, using the exact same words, Phinehas has righteousness accounted to him for his work which was an action he exerted for the honor of God. Of course, for this who claim “faith alone” they must of necessity correct this passage to insert that it was actually the faith underlying the actions that was rewarded.

Catholics do not teach that salvation, at least initial justification, is achieved by faith and works. Initial salvation is by faith and baptism and is an utterly free gift of God (see Eph 2:8,9). No Catholic who knows what the Church teaches would ever say we are saved initially by works. However, even here it can get a bit sticky for a Protestant since “believe” is a verb, something we do and could be considered a “work.” We have to do something — believe. But said I, the former Evangelical, “No you just need to receive the free gift.” Ah, yes, but even the word “receive” is a verb—something I must do.

DAVID: James 2:17 “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” James 2:26: “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

James uses Abraham and Rahab as examples to show that their faith was alive and real because their faith was followed by action. Those actions did not “save” them, or earn their salvation. Those actions proved that their faith was real, alive, and genuine. </p>

STEVE: But it says Rehab was “justified” when she did what she did. Luther hated this verse, and like you, he had to add the words to “show their faith was alive” in order to fit this square verse into your round hole. The Catholic Church has done a beautiful job of letting the Bible speak for itself without trying to make it say something it doesn’t say.

DAVID: James is not teaching that faith alone is insufficient to save us, and therefore we need to do some works to earn our salvation. James is teaching that saving faith, which is alive, will be demonstrated by what it does. It is not “faith plus works,” but “faith that works.” True faith and good works are inseparable. Faith is the cause of our salvation. Good works are the result of that faith. When Evangelicals say that we are saved by “faith alone,” we are not saying that we are saved by dead faith; we are saying that we don’t earn our salvation through good works. Those are just the result of saving faith.

STEVE: You keep taking whole paragraphs to tell James what he really meant to say, whereas James does not say it in a way that you like it. You have to keep filling in for James and adding words to make his passage fit your theology. That is called *eisegesus*, not exegesis.

DAVID: This idea of good works following genuine faith is clearly taught in Ephesians 2:8-10. Verse 10 says that we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works”. The good works are the result of our salvation, not the means of salvation.

Christians are initially justified by faith, not works. But in our continuing Christian life cooperation with the Holy Spirit, good works and holiness is required for final salvation. This is the aspect rejected by Protestants because it doesn’t fit the newly invented novelty of Luther’s “faith alone.” The Early Church knew nothing of “faith alone.”

It should be remembered too, that even the good works we do are solely by the grace of God. He is giving us the grace to accomplish good deeds. It is like my grandson Dominic who wanted to buy me a Christmas present when he was a wee lad. He asked to borrow \$25. I gave it to him. He bought me a nice Christmas present and gave it to me full of pride. Who bought that Christmas present? Dominic did. But he did it with the money I gave him. It is the same with us and good works pleasing to God.

Lastly, and I am writing this on the fly and just adding random thoughts, so to speak, I would remind you that Protestants have turned Paul and James words about faith and works into a Catholic vs. Protestant debate. In actuality, a whole new world of understanding will come to anyone if they realize in the historical context that the words regarding faith and works are primarily in the historical context of a debate between Jew vs. Gentile. Works are the markers, such as circumcision and ceremonial law requirements, by which Jews thought they were justified or saved. Paul is arguing that one does not have to fulfill the Jewish markers (called “works of the law”) but one is saved by faith in Christ like our father Abraham. This is exactly understood by Catholics who really understand their teaching.

You may want to read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to better understand what we really believe and not what you’ve been *taught* we believe.

A good 8 minute video clip by a friend on the context of faith and works in biblical times can be listened to here: <https://catholicproductions.com/blogs/blog/the-dead-sea-scrolls-paul-and-the-works-of-the-law>.

God bless you my friend and thanks for your thoughts. I hope my response is not offensive but helpful.