

*We know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.*  
(Galatians 2:16)



## Salvation by Faith or by Works?

At the center of Christian faith is the promise of Jesus Christ. Scripture makes it clear that human beings are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and not by our own human works. We are justified (“made right”) in the sight of God, not by what we do, but through trust in the saving work of Christ.

Unfortunately, many Christians — even after acknowledging that we are saved by faith and not by works — go on to describe faith itself **as if it were a work** by which we accomplish our own salvation. They speak of faith itself as a spiritual action or decision that we need to make in order to earn eternal life.

But again, Scripture shows that “salvation by grace through faith” is not a human accomplishment. The Bible teaches that faith is *not* a human work we perform to earn salvation.

**By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before-hand to be our way of life.** (Ephesians 2:8-10)

The Bible clearly states that being saved through faith is not our own doing. It happens “by grace” — that is, through the gracious act of God himself. We are people of faith, not because of an act or decision on our part. On the contrary, “we are what he has made us.”

## A Human Decision?

Christians who describe faith as a human work also tend to reflect this understanding in the way they approach evangelism. It is not uncommon to hear the promise of the gospel into what amounts to a threat:

*“If you want to be saved, you must make a decision for Christ...” or “you must accept Jesus as your Savior...”*

Such an approach gives the false impression that human beings can earn salvation by simply obeying the First Commandment (the command to believe in God). However, Scripture shows that obeying the law — even a law demanding faith — does not have the power to save our lives.

**If a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the Scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.** (Galatians 3:21b-22)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is more than just a human-centered command to “accept Christ.” It is first and foremost the divine promise that Christ has accepted us. The true gospel is the message of what Christ has done for us — a promise given and based on the saving work of Christ alone.

Scripture says that God justifies us “by faith and not by works of the law.” Therefore, by definition, saving faith *cannot* be a work of the law. Faith is not something that we can choose by our own human will.

It is God himself who chooses us to be people of faith, by his own Holy Spirit at work in his Word.

**God said: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.** (Romans 9:15-16)

## Who Really Decides?

To claim that we are able to save ourselves by an action of the human will, is to greatly underestimate the power of sin. To trust in our own free-will, is to make free-will into an idol. For when we trust in our ourselves, we no longer trust completely in Christ.

Jesus wants our faith to rest in him alone and not in the idol of our own human reason or strength. That is why Jesus insists that faith is not our decision; it is *his* decision.

**Jesus said: “You did not choose me but I chose you.”** (John 15:16)

To call Jesus our Savior is to admit that he saved us when we could not save ourselves; this is what faith is all about.

## Salvation by Grace through Faith

Scripture teaches that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. It also teaches faith is not our own doing. So then, how does faith really happen?

**Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)**

According to Scripture, God himself creates faith through the message of Jesus Christ. By God's own Word, the Holy Spirit moves our hearts to believe the promise that Christ has died for our sins and is risen for us.

**I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)**

Scripture says that the gospel itself brings about faith within us, by the active power of God. In the speaking of his Word, God himself changes our heart and gives us the hope of eternal life.

Therefore, since God has saved us by his grace through his own gift of faith, we do not need a law-based scheme of salvation, founded on our own deeds or decisions. Nor should we seek after such a thing, for to do so would be to turn away from the grace we have received in Christ.

True faith is a God-given trust in Christ alone. By this faith God gives us the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life.

**By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing... (Eph. 2:8)**

### Digging Deeper into Scripture

For those who are interested in learning more about how God saves us through his own gift of faith, one of the best places to go is the **Book of Romans**.

In Romans, the Apostle Paul lays out the logic of how God brings about salvation apart from works of the law, through his own saving work in Jesus Christ. Paul explains that it is the Holy Spirit at work in God's Word alone that has the power to change hearts and create faith.

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# Saved by Grace Through Faith



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