

Justification: Sola Fide and Romans 10:9?

by Jim Seghers

The protestant principle that one is saved by faith alone, *sola fide*, is sometimes defended by citing the following quotation from the Book of Romans. "Because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9).

The difficulty with this example of biblical interpretation is that it puts a wall around the passage if it has no relationship to the rest of the Bible. Inspiration affirms that the Bible has one primary author, the Holy Spirit. Therefore biblical passages must be interpreted in a manner consistent with the entire word of God.

Romans 10:9 is one example of a number of passages that present an **abbreviated summary** of what is necessary for salvation. For example, Jesus preached that one must "repent and believe" (Mk 1:15). However, when the rich young man came to Jesus and asked him what he must do to be saved, Jesus answered: "keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17). Jesus said nothing about faith. Peter also omits faith when he responds to the question "Brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)? He replied "Repent, and be baptized every one of you" (Acts 2:39)? However, in answering the Philippian jailer, Paul says: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). St. Paul doesn't mention repentance or baptism.¹

If one assumes the position that Rom 10:9 provides the complete blueprint of what is required for salvation, then very important truths are rejected as unnecessary. This reduces Christianity to 1) confessing "that Jesus Christ is Lord" and "believe in my heart that God raised him from the dead." However, what about repentance? Is baptism superfluous? Are the commandments irrelevant? May one reject the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the creation, the Fall and the consequences of original sin, the inerrancy of the Bible, inspiration, Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross, the existence of heaven and hell, and the Second Coming?

There is a further problem with this rigid literalistic interpretation of Romans 10:9. The passage specifically stipulates the obligation to "confess with his lips." Does this mean that the mute cannot be saved? The reality is that we must accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. However, that faith obliges us to accept and obey the whole of Christ's revelation. Living faith is never alone.

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¹ However, both the jailer and his household were baptized (Acts 16:33).