

good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil” (Luke 6:44-45). Apart from righteous living, therefore, a person has no part in Christ: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does* the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21), for Jesus “became the author of eternal salvation *to all who obey Him*” (Hebrews 5:9).

Church Attendance as Evidence of Saving Faith

Due to a common misconception, a particular good work should be singled out and discussed, viz., *church attendance*. While acknowledging valid hindrances to attending church—internal hindrances such as physical handicaps or sicknesses, and external hindrances such as a hostile government toward churches—apart from these the Bible knows of no “Christian” who does not attend a local church.

First, God commands us to gather together with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). God wills us to worship Him in public assemblies (Nehemiah 8:5-8; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Colossians 3:16), where we also “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:11). In the assembly of saints, God equips us to serve Him and one another, educates us about Him, alerts us of deceitful doctrines, and matures us toward Christ-like morality (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Second, the word of the Lord presupposes that the ordinary Christian life is a church life. It assumes that you have rulers over you to whom you submit

(Hebrews 13:17), and that you have access to a church court system by which to settle disputes (Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 6:1-6).

Third, the Scriptures use a metaphor of a head and body for the relationship between Christ and His Church (Colossians 1:18). And as no one can have fellowship with another person’s head and not also with that person’s body, neither can one be united by faith to Christ (the head) without also being in fellowship with a group of believers at a local church (the body). The head and body form an indivisible unit.

Thus God considers church attendance absolutely mandatory. In fact, He deems those outside of the church as unbelievers (Matthew 18:17), and indeed, to be in the very hands of Satan (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Since the Bible so often warns us against deceiving ourselves (1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 6:7; Hebrews 3:13; 1 John 1:8), you will do well to consider if you have this kind of faith. Everyone that the Father gives to Jesus will come to Him (John 6:37).

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**WHAT
MUST
I DO
to be**

SAVED

?

How do you answer this most important question? When a Philippian jailer posed this question to the disciples of Jesus, they replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). But what does it mean to *believe* in Jesus?

What Saving Faith is NOT

1. *Not merely a belief that God exists.*

Everybody believes that God exists. In Romans 1:18-21, the apostle Paul tells us that God has revealed himself to every person so that all know Him. He has shown Himself within every person and through the created world that surrounds them. This faith, however, is obviously not *saving* faith because every person will not be saved: “Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

2. *Not merely a belief that there is only one God.*

James warns us: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). Though the demons have this kind of faith, we should not expect to see them in heaven.

3. *Not merely a temporary faith.*

On one occasion, Jesus said to a group of Jews, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:44), and yet astonishingly just a few verses earlier this group is described as those who *believed* Jesus (v. 31)! Saving faith is a persevering faith: “For we have become partakers of Christ *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast *to the*

end” (Hebrews 3:14). Only a faith that endures will save.

What Saving Faith IS

1. *Faith that Jesus is God.*

Scripture clearly presents Jesus as God. It proclaims Him “the eternally blessed God” (Romans 9:5), “the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20), and “our great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13). Jesus names Himself the great “I AM” (John 8:58), the name by which God identified Himself to Moses 1500 years earlier (Exodus 3:14). And Jesus makes belief in this a requirement for salvation: “If you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

2. *Faith in the works of Christ alone.*

We all come into this world as sinners, having a sinful nature. Our “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9), and this from our mother’s womb (Psalm 51:5). And only sinful works proceed from our sinful nature. God accounts each of us as “an unclean thing” (Isaiah 64:6), and “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!” (Job 14:4). As sinners we can do nothing good: “There is none who does good, no, not one” (Romans 3:12). This sinful nature of ours prevents us from pleasing God (Romans 8:8), and from obeying even one of His commandments (Romans 8:7). So we must put away the thought of earning our salvation by our works if even our most “righteous” works God sees as “filthy rages” (Isaiah 64:6).

Therefore, we must seek salvation outside of ourselves. We must seek it in Jesus *alone*. He obeyed His Father perfectly (John 15:10), and so could say to His Father, “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4). He “was in all points tempted as we are, *yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). Consequently, He became an acceptable sacrifice to God, substituted on behalf of sinners (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2, 25). By His “obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). Yet only by believing in Christ’s works do we benefit from them (John 3:16; Romans 9:30; Philippians 3:8-9).

3. *Faith that salvation is by God’s grace and mercy alone.*

Grace and mercy motivate God to give us these saving works of Jesus: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9); “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5). God does not repay a debt to us, but gifts us freely (Romans 6:23). Anyone wishing to earn God’s favor, falls away from the only gracious way of obtaining it (Gal. 5:4).

4. *Faith that produces a life characterized by good works.*

Though God saves by grace, our salvation is “*unto good works*” (Ephesians 2:10). A life without good works indicates a lack of this grace and a lack of true saving faith. As Jesus said: “Every tree is known by its own fruit. . . . [Likewise,] a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth