

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## WHAT DID YOU SAY?

by Mike Benson

*“An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire” (Proverbs 16:27).*

*[Written last year as wildfires across southern California were being extinguished – Editor]*

The figures are staggering:

- At least 3,000+ homes, 30 businesses, and 700 other structures were charred.
- Financial analysts estimate losses to exceed \$2 billion.
- Thus far 22 people have perished, including one firefighter, while dozens have been injured.
- Over 100,000 people were displaced; thousands were without electricity.
- At one time roughly 15,600 firefighters were on the scene trying to control the conflagration.
- More than \$9 million was spent each day in firefighting efforts. Services included 1,900 fire engines, 203 water trucks, 43 air tankers and 105 helicopters.
- Some 800,000 acres of land were scorched. The effort stretched over 180 miles in six counties.

The destructive force of these fires is difficult to grasp. Even those who have witnessed the actual loss of life and property find it hard to articulate the magnitude and enormity of the devastation. Entire forests and towns have literally been engulfed in flames. In many instances, little is left but glowing embers and white ash.

Just think. A single match—barely three-quarters of an inch in length. A thin piece of rigid paper with a small dab of white phosphorus on the end. But watch what happens when that tiny entity is ignited. Notice how that miniscule spark grows into a flicker, and then into a yellow flare. Then consider the ravages of those eleven fires in the Golden State. Remember the toll in terms of human life. Ponder the scale, if you can, of the damage wrought on citizens across California. Then remember . . .

**The tongue is capable of this kind of ruin and more!** The Bible says, “Behold, how great a matter [“forest,” New King James Version] a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell” (James 3:5-6). With all of that blackened landscape “burned” into our consciousness by the news media, it is impossible to miss James’ point. Despite its relative size, an uncontrolled tongue can wreak unimaginable havoc in our lives.

Imagine how many relational ties have been severed because of

tactless speech (Proverbs 25:20). Imagine how many friendships have ended as the result of gossip (Proverbs 11:13; 16:28; 18:8; 20:19; 26:22; Ecclesiastes 10:20; 1 Timothy 5:13). Imagine how many marriages have been “seared” by hot-tempered and inflammatory language (Psalm 37:8; Proverbs 14:17; 22:24-25; 27:4; Ecclesiastes 7:9). Imagine how many congregations of God’s people have split because of lies uttered under the veil of envy (Jeremiah 5:1-3; 30-31; 9:1-9; Hosea 11:12; 12:1; Proverbs 12:22; 16:16-19; Psalm 5:6; Micah 6:12; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9-10). Imagine how many sound preachers and elders have lost their influence due to false rumor and slander (Exodus 20:16; Ezekiel 22:9; James 4:11-12; Proverbs 21:28; Jeremiah 6:28; 9:4; Psalm 101:5).<sup>1</sup> Imagine how many new converts have been led from the faith by deceitful and fallacious talk (Psalm 12:1-3; Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 5:6). Imagine how many young women have sacrificed their virginity on the altar of empty flattery (Proverbs 26:28; 29:5; Psalm 12:3-5). Imagine how many once-valuable leaders in the Kingdom have been brought low because of arrogant boasting (Luke 18:9-14; 1

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John 2:16; 1 Corinthians 3:3; 13:4; Philippians 2:2-3; James 4:13-17; Revelation 18:11,15,19). Imagine how many Christian teens have invalidated their example by foolish and coarse jesting (Ephesians 5:4). Imagine how many tender hearts have been crushed by mockery and ridicule (Proverbs 14:31; 17:5; 1 Samuel 1:6-7; Genesis 21:9; Job 30:1-14; Psalm 35:21; 40:15; 2 Kings 2:23; Jeremiah 20:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:2).

Yes, “the tongue is a fire.” Dear Christian, **each of us needs to pause and reflect on the harm our tongue can inflict during a simple conversation.**<sup>2</sup> Our words are powerful (Proverbs 18:21)—they can help, or they can consume (Proverbs 12:18). *“For lack of wood the fire goeth out; and where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth. As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife”*

(Proverbs 26:20-21; cf. Matthew 12:34-37).

Let me close with an admonition from that esteemed theologian, Smokey Bear, “Only YOU can prevent forest fires.” *“What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile”* (Psalm 34:12-13; cf. 1 Peter 3:10).

1. Ancient rabbis taught that slander is capable of killing three people in one thrust: the slanderer, the person who listens to and accepts such, and the innocent victim whose reputation is irreparably damaged in the public eye.

2. Timothy D. Hall, “Firestarters,” HEM-Lines, Oct. 30, '03, Vol. 7, No. 17.

**STRANGERS ARE FRIENDS WE HAVEN'T MET**

God knows NO STRANGERS, He loves us all,  
the poor, the rich, the great, the small...

He is a friend who is always there to share our troubles and lessen our cares...

No one is a stranger in God's sight,  
for GOD IS LOVE and in HIS LIGHT

May we, too, try in our small way to make NEW FRIENDS from day to day...

So pass no stranger with an unseeing eye,  
for God may be sending A NEW FRIEND BY.

**SALVATION BY “FAITH ONLY” IS NOT BY FAITH**

by Lee Moses

Most people have heard such religious slogans as “faith plus nothing else saves,” “just believe and you will be saved,” and the self-contradictory but oft-repeated “salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.” The intended meaning of such sayings is crystal clear – one cannot do anything beyond realizing in his mind that Jesus Christ is the Son of God before that person is numbered among the saved. This is the popular doctrine of “salvation by ‘faith only.’” But is this teaching actually **by faith**? God declares, *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17). If any teaching does not come from the Bible, God's all-sufficient revelation to man, it is not by faith. Thus whether or not the doctrine of “faith alone” is actually **by faith** hinges on whether or not the Bible teaches such.

**WHAT IS FAITH?**

The Bible uses the term “faith” (or “believe,” its verb form) in different senses. Faith can refer to the act of believing something to be true, as in Matthew 9:28: *“the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this?”* Faith can refer to the confidence of a clear conscience, as in Romans 14:23: *“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”* Faith can refer to one's fidelity or trustworthiness, as in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *“God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.”* Faith can refer to the New Testament, as in Galatians 3:23: *“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.”* Lastly, faith can refer to a trusting belief

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that has manifested itself in works of obedience, as in Romans 1:8: *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world”* (all emphases added).

There is a great deal of misunderstanding regarding the nature of faith. Some advocate the doctrine of “faith only” because they believe that salvation by faith excludes any kind of effort on the part of the individual receiving salvation. The New Testament does make clear that neither works of personal merit nor works of the Law of Moses lead to salvation (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-9). But faith and works are not mutually exclusive: *“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love”* (Galatians 5:6). Biblical faith **works**. *“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent”* (John 6:29). Our Lord called faith itself a work, which indeed it is. Why are there so many admonitions to believe, and have faith, if believing is not something that one **does**?

**DOES FAITH NOT SAVE?**

It is undeniable that one must have faith to be saved. It is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). If one does not believe in the Deity of Jesus Christ, that person will die in his sins (John 8:24). In the New Testament, faith is mentioned many times as a prerequisite to salvation (Mark 16:16; John 3:16; Acts 13:39; 16:31; Romans 10:9-10; et al.). However, other prerequisites are also mentioned for salvation: repentance (Acts 2:38), confession of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and baptism (1 Peter 3:21). To conclude that one is saved by faith only requires blinding oneself to

numerous passages that say more is necessary.

A number of different Biblical uses for “faith” have already been examined, from the mental assent of a thing to be true to the faith that has manifested itself in obedience. When the doctrine of “faith only” is taught it is generally not using this last definition, but the first. However, one would be hard pressed to find a Biblical account of anyone being Divinely commended, much less saved, at the point of believing something to be true. Faith is expressed in words and/or action before it is commended. James asks, *“What doth it profit my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?”* (James 2:14). Faith can save a person, but a faith without works cannot. James also said, *“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble”* (v. 19). Here is a commendation of faith which has not expressed itself in action – “thou doest well” – however, it is a tongue-in-cheek commendation; as James also compares such faith to that of the demons and proclaims it **dead** (vv. 17, 20, 26). This context is the only passage in the Bible where the term “faith only” is found; and it reads, *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and **not** by faith only”* (v. 24, emphasis added).

The illustration has been aptly used of two oars: if a man only rows his boat with one oar, he will go in circles; but if he will row with both oars, he is then able to move forward. Likewise, it is only when faith is accompanied by its works that the soul is able to move forward to salvation. If not, a soul is merely going in circles, never moving beyond the stagnant sea of sin. It was **by faith** that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and all the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 **acted**, and thus were blessed.

Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16). Yes, faith is essential for salvation, but it is not all that is essential for salvation. The grammar of this verse **demand**s that baptism precede salvation, and that baptism is **just as much** a requirement for salvation as is faith. Faith saves, but not faith only.

**WHAT ABOUT UNBAPTIZED BELIEVERS?**

When confronted with Mark 16:16, some will respond by directing attention to the second half of the verse: *“but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* They then claim that the failure to mention baptism in the second half of the verse means that those who believe only shall be saved. The problem with this is that a third class of people has been imagined in this verse where Christ only mentioned two: (1) those who believe and are baptized, and (2) those who do not believe. There is no mention of the third, those who believe and are not baptized.

To refer to an unbaptized “believer” is really a misnomer – one who is Biblically “believing” is one who has been baptized. Paul and Silas baptized a Philippian jailer, **following** which he is described as *“believing in God”* (Acts 16:33-34). Paul on a later occasion met a group of about twelve disciples in Ephesus whom he knew to be believers (19:2). But when he became aware that they did not have a true understanding, he asked, *“Unto what then were ye baptized?”* (v. 3). When Paul knew this group to be believers, he also knew them to have been baptized.

The question “what about unbaptized believers?” could be rephrased “what about **disobedient** believers?” When the multitude assembled at Pentecost asked Peter and the other apostles what they

*continued from page 3*

should do about their sinful state, Peter told them, *“Repent and be baptized . . . Then they that gladly received his word were baptized”* (Acts 2:37-38, 41). What if they would have instead responded, *“We are content with merely believing the things which you have taught us, and have no intention of repenting of our sins nor of being baptized?”* This could scarcely be called *“gladly receiving the word.”* Jesus asked, *“And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”* (Luke 6:46). He also declared assuredly, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21). Unbaptized believers are among those whose faith is compared to that of demons (James 2:19). Certain *“chief rulers”* who believed in Jesus but refused to confess Him are said to have *“loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”* (John 12:42-43). This implies that their failure to do more than merely believe left them in a position where they would not receive the praise of God. Mark 16:16 may not specifically address the third class of *“unbaptized believers,”* but it is abundantly clear from the verse itself and other passages that this class is not included among the *“shall be saved.”*

**CONCLUSION**

The doctrine of salvation by *“faith only”* dominates the denominational world. Through it many sincere people are being led astray, being given false assurance of salvation, and being robbed of incentive to do the will of God. No doctrine not taught by the Scriptures can said to be *“by faith,”* according to Romans 10:17. The doctrine of *“faith only”*

is nowhere taught in Scripture; and thus, as much as its advocates attempt to emphasize *“faith,”* is not even **by faith**. May good and honest hearts wholly reject this doctrine and obey from the heart that form of doctrine that will save them from sin (Romans 6:17).



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**GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION**

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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