

## Why Do Christians Argue About Creeds and Deeds, Faith and Works?

The short answer is because human beings have built walls around Jesus' teachings. Have you ever heard someone begin a religious discussion or debate by stating "It's deeds not creeds; or it's faith not works". Sometimes these catchy phrases are short hand for framing the belief systems that separate Christian doctrines. Much has been written to support, contrast and deny these catch phrases. Much of what has been written has become endlessly complex and rooted in a desire to prove the author's position as "being theologically correct" and results in doctrinal wall building. Rather than examine the walls established by men for their merits and flaws, let us see what Jesus said about these catch phrases.

To determine what Jesus says about these catch phrases, we must first define what each word in these catch phrases means so that we can find appropriate references in the New Testament. To ensure the secular, religious and Biblical meanings of each word are properly considered, the definitions will be taken from Synonym.Com which considers such nuances. **Deeds** are defined as "performance of moral or religious acts" with the synonyms works and activity. **Creeds** are defined as "the written body of teachings of a religious group that are generally accepted by that group" with the synonyms belief and doctrine. **Faith** is defined as "a strong belief in a supernatural power" with the synonym belief. **Works** are defined as the "performance of moral or religious acts" with the synonym deeds and activity. With those definitions in our pocket, we must also find the simplest definition of each catch phrase.

The meaning of **It's deeds not creeds** is designed to set a stage for argument as to whether moral acts or proper beliefs are more important for salvation. This debate is as old as the study of Jesus' challenge of the Pharisees' belief that their strict interpretation of Mosaic Law was correct. The meaning of **It's faith not works** is designed to set a stage for argument as to whether faith alone is necessary for salvation. This debate has its roots in the Protestant Reformation and Luther's statement that Sole Fide (saved by faith alone) is the article on which the Protestant Church stands or falls. Because these two catch phrases want to enmesh salvation, it also must be defined. Per Synonym.Com, **salvation** is defined as "the act of delivering from sin or saving from evil" with the synonyms saving and redemption.

It would appear from our definitions above that creeds and faith are closely related and deeds and works are identical. So what does our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ say about these four words and their relationship to salvation? After all, He is the ultimate authority on God's word - He is the Word and His word is truly the baseline for all

Christian doctrine. Since there are various synonyms for the words we seek in various translations of the Bible, we will use a variety of New Testament translations to include: KJV, NIV and NABRE. When cross referencing what Jesus says about creeds/faith/belief/deeds/works/salvation/saving, here is what we find.

When examining creeds (beliefs) first, we find that much of the New Testament deals with spreading the Gospel to show that Jesus is the Messiah, the source of salvation and that *belief* in Him is necessary for an individual's salvation. Jesus himself often shows that belief in Him will save an individual. Several times Jesus tells someone that their faith in Him has saved them. For example in Luke 7:50 (KJV), Jesus said to the woman, "Thy faith has saved thee, go in peace". In Matthew 9:22 (NIV) Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment. And in Matthew 21:22, (NABRE) Jesus said to them in reply, "Amen, I say to you, if you have faith and do not waver, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. <sup>22</sup> Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive." Clearly belief and faith are fundamentally and critically important in the preaching of Jesus.

Now let us examine deeds and works. In John 5:28-29 (KJV), Jesus says, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, <sup>29</sup> And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation". In Matthew 25:31-46 (NIV), Jesus says, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was

thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” And in Revelation 22:12 (NABRE), Jesus says, “Behold, I am coming soon. I bring with me the recompense I will give to each according to his deeds”. Clearly deeds and works are fundamentally and critically important to salvation in the preaching of Jesus.

It is important to observe in the New Testament how Jesus continually reminds us that his teachings are inclusive for all people – the Jew and Gentile; the sinner and the righteous; the innocent little children and worldly. As a final reminder of the inclusivity of Jesus’ teachings regarding belief and works, examine Mark 9:38-42 (NIV).

“Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” <sup>39</sup> “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, <sup>40</sup> for whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. <sup>42</sup> If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea”.

Now there are many more quotes from Jesus that reinforce the positions that He articulated above on creeds (belief), deeds, faith and works. By His testimony, there is no question that belief in His teachings (creeds) *and* good deeds are critical to salvation – it is not one or the other. His testimony on faith and works is also crystal clear – faith in Him is essential to being saved and good works enable an inheritance of eternal salvation while wicked deeds capture eternal punishment. Therefore Jesus says it is creeds *and* deeds and faith *and* works that lead to salvation!