

'It is by both faith and works that a person is justified.'
Evaluate this view with reference to Christianity.

Answer 1

It is indeed by both faith and works that a person is justified. The source for coming to this conclusion is the Bible. The Bible is the revelation of God and we can only know how to be justified if God reveals it to us. We cannot work it out for ourselves. The Letter of James in James 2:24 says "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone". It could not be clearer. It is true that some biblical texts refer to being justified by faith, such as in Romans. However, this is to misunderstand the meaning. Such texts refer to faith as a necessary beginning. Faith is never seen as sufficient by itself for eternal salvation. Faith is an act of the intellect. It is necessary for salvation but not sufficient. Protestantism through Luther's influence claimed that faith was not just necessary but also sufficient. The Letter of James shows that this clearly is not the case. He pointed out that even the demons have faith and believe but that can hardly mean that they are therefore justified.

The Council of Trent made clear the Catholic doctrine of justification in Canon 9, 12 and Canon 14. It does not deny that faith is necessary, but argues that certain things must be done by people in order to keep that justification. Therefore, both Catholic and Protestant agree that faith justifies and works do not. But unlike Protestants, Catholics argue that works are necessary to continue attaining justification. In fact Protestants also refer to works but argue that it is a natural result of justification. They would say that real faith produces good works, but it isn't these works that save you. Good works are the effect of salvation, not the cause of it. Hence they would understand James 2 in this light.

So perhaps the conclusion is that both faith and works do justify a person. James wasn't offering a different understanding to Paul. Both need to be understood in their context and both show that faith and works are linked to justification. Perhaps the real debate is about the extent of justification. For Protestants it seems that Faith is both about entering into salvation and remaining in, whilst for Catholics it seems to be that faith is about entering in to salvation and works is about remaining in. A recent development in the debate has been the writings of E P Sanders and N T Wright who argue that Jews in Paul's time did not have a works view about righteousness. What Paul was rejecting was the Jewish view at the time that Gentiles had to keep the law to be part of the covenant people.

Comments

This is a fair attempt at an evaluation and certainly of a higher level than answer 2. There are clearly a variety of views expressed with some support given. The answer moves beyond the bare AO1 approach of just stating some verses from the Bible. The implications of those verses are discussed and developed and the different views about the role of works is discussed. There is also an attempt to harmonise the different biblical verses. There is clear reference back to the statement and assessment of it. Other scholars are referred to but their views are not really developed and the final conclusion is not clear.

Answer 2

Martin Luther was born in 1483. He was on his way to becoming a lawyer when a close brush with death frightened him into becoming a monk. He joined the Augustinian order. He thought salvation was ultimately obtained by pleasing God. Then whilst he was lecturing on Romans he changed his views and argued that a person is justified by faith alone. However, the Letter of James says "You believe that there is only one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder". The Letter of James goes on to make clear that "a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone". Therefore, it seems that the Biblical view is that it is by both faith and works. Faith is the necessary beginning. But it is an act of the intellect and that is not sufficient by itself for eternal salvation. The whole process that brings us to eternal destiny must include works including repentance.

Luther was born in 1483 and became professor of theology at Wittenberg University. He equally argued from the Bible about justification. He had been studying Romans and came to the conclusion that it was faith alone that justified. He pointed out Romans 1v17 "... a righteousness that is by faith from first to last". Equally Ephesians 2 states that "... we have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law..." This shows that works do not save.

It seems that the Bible contradicts itself. Both sides use the Bible to support their case.

Comments

This is a weak attempt at evaluation. It starts with an irrelevant few sentences on Martin Luther. The answer does have two sides of an argument but they are very basic with no real discussion. There is reference to relevant Biblical text but they are just stated rather than developed as part of an argument. The two sides are stated in isolation to each other so there is no attempt at evaluation or reasoning towards a conclusion. There is a brief partial attempt at a conclusion in the last line. Again it is not developed. The Ephesians 2 quote is in fact from Galatians 2v16.

This is more of an AO1 skill answer than an AO2. It consists of reciting some arguments but not weighing the relative strengths and weaknesses of those arguments.

Answer 3

The council of Trent sought to clarify Catholic doctrine in the light of teachings of the Protestant movement, and in particular Luther. One of the doctrines in dispute was that of justification. The Catholic doctrine was that one is justified by faith and works. In contrast Luther and the Protestants claimed that one was justified by faith alone. After much discussion the Catholic doctrine was upheld by the council. Texts from the Bible were used by both sides in the debate, each claiming the Bible as their grounds of authority for their view. Those arguing for both faith and works appealed to James 2: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone". This was further upheld by Canon 9, 12 and 14 at the council of Trent. Sinners were justified on the basis of an internal righteousness, graciously implanted within their persons by God. This was an act of grace not merited. However, there also had to be good works that would allow God to justify them. Entry was by an act of grace but staying in was through works. So both Faith and works were required for justification. The council rejected the idea

that you could be justified by faith without any need for obedience or spiritual renewal.

Luther strongly disagreed. He famously argued for “sola fide” – “by faith alone”. This view was equally argued for by verses from the Bible such as Galatians 2 which states that “... we have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law...”

So is it faith and works or faith alone? Perhaps they are both correct and the differences are caused by the ambiguity of the words “faith” and “justification”. It seems that for the council of Trent, Justification referred to both the entering in to salvation and the continuing process including the final salvation. In this case faith without works would suggest no real faith at all since real faith must show signs of regeneration. This seems consistent with Luther’s view as well. When Luther referred to justification it seems that he meant the entry point. The continuation and final salvation he referred to as sanctification. Real faith (the point of entry) would indeed show itself in good works as there would be an inner change going on. For Luther, good works followed justification. Indeed the council of Trent made a proposal very close to this understanding but it was rejected.

So it could be argued that the statement is true as long as it is understood what each side means by faith and justification.

The debate has recently taken a new twist with the publication of by E P Sanders “Paul, the Law and the Jewish People”. Sanders claims that the writings of Paul have always been interpreted as the Jews of the time having a justification by works understanding. It was this that Paul was seen to be criticising in his letters. Sanders talks about “covenantal nomism”. By this he means the behaviour appropriate to a covenant member. Works of the Law are not works done to earn God’s favour but about membership in the covenant family. This understanding sees God’s grace of election as a special covenant people the way into salvation rather than by works. However, this does pose a problem as to how Judaism actually differs from Christianity. Indeed this new view argues that justification by faith not by works was about Gentiles being included in the people of God by faith without the bother of becoming Jews.

Comments

This is a wide ranging discussion showing understanding of the debate between faith and works. Of the three answers, this is the best. The arguments are discussed and general assessed rather than just being stated. There is a clear path of reasoning though the final conclusion about the new perspective by E P Sanders is only hinted at. The knowledge base has been reasonably well selected. However, some of the details about the council of Trent are not really relevant. Possible discussion around the words of the debate (justification/faith/works) including recent perspectives may have been a better structure. Also new perspectives could include N T Wright’s view that Paul’s use of justification meant “a member of God’s people”.

Question 1

'The New Testament letters support the view that justification is by faith alone.'

Evaluate this view.

Answer 1

One of the divisions between Catholicism and Protestantism is the means of justification. The Council of Trent, in answer to Luther and growth of Protestantism, decreed that Justification was by faith and works. Entry was by an act of grace by God and continuation of remaining justified was by works. Luther and Protestantism had taken a different view – justification was by faith alone (sola fide). Both used the authority of Scripture to prove their position. Verses such as Romans “righteousness that is by faith from first to last” and “we have been justified through faith”. Whereas the Catholic position appealed to verses from James such as “A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” and “If a man claims to have faith but has no deeds...can such faith save him?” So the New Testament Letters do support the view that justification is by faith alone but they also support the view that justification is by faith and works.

One line of argument to resolve this apparent contradiction is to argue that the two sides use the same words but are referring to different things. The word “faith” may be a point in case. The letter of James has the illustration that even the demons have faith. But real faith is one that is accompanied by works. As James says “show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do”. There is a connection between faith and works. Another area of confusion may revolve around the concept of justification. For the council of Trent, justification included both entering into salvation and also the final salvation. For Luther Justification referred more to the entry point and sanctification referred to the ongoing process that ultimately led to final salvation. So possibly the letter support both views of faith alone and faith and works.

A new perspective by E P Sanders has focussed on the background to Paul's letters. It has been argued that the Jews at the time believed that justification was by works. But Sanders has questioned this and argued that Jews hope of salvation was based on their status as God's covenant people who possess the law. So Sanders rejects the idea of merit by works. The works referred to in the New Testament are the works of living out covenant obligations. The Jews did not think that works earned salvation. This recent view has been challenged. One could question why Paul was convinced Christianity was superior to Judaism. They are, according to Sanders, merely different dispensations of the same covenant. It still seems doubtful that Paul saw works as evidential rather than instrumental. So, overall, the weight of evidence seems to support the statement.

Answer 2

The extent to which the New Testament Letters support the view that justification is by faith alone is debateable. Certainly some verses can be quoted that suggest that position. For example, Galatians says that we have put our faith in Christ Jesus and not by observing the law. Perhaps an even clearer verse can be found in Romans where Paul writes that "...righteousness that is by faith from first to last". Later on in Romans, Paul writes "we have been justified through faith".

So what is the argument against the statement? Well, there are other verses that suggest it is not by faith alone but also works. For instance James writes "A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone". It does seem that the Bible contradicts itself.

However, scholars have attempted to harmonise the verses as they feel that the Bible is the word of God and therefore cannot contradict itself. They look to see if the interpretation is right. For instance they suggest that maybe the verses about justification refer to both the way one enters the state of justification and also the way to continue in righteousness.

Another approach to harmonise is to consider the meaning of "faith". It could refer to faith that is dead or faith that is real. This would make more sense of the passage in James where he says "If a man claims to have faith but has no deeds...can such faith save him?" and later he says "I will show you my faith by what I do".

So perhaps the conclusion to the statement is that faith is the way in, but true faith will show itself by works and works are the means by which you remain justified.

Answer 3

There are a number of verses in the New Testament letters that support the view that justification is by faith alone. For example, Romans 1v17 "... a righteousness that is by faith from first to last" and 5:1 "... we have been justified through faith." Further support can be found in Ephesians 2 "...For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast". In addition Galatians 2 states that "... we have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law..."

These verses suggest that justification is by faith alone.

However those who argue against faith alone (*sola fide*) refer to James 2 "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder". This verse implies that faith alone is not sufficient. James goes on to say "A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone".

It seems that if biblical authority is the measure of truth then both sides have a case and it appears that the Bible contradicts itself and so is no guide at all.

Question 2

'The role of works is central to the understanding of justification.'
Evaluate this statement in reference to Christianity.

Answer 1

The role of works is not at all central to justification. Luther made that clear. The means of being justified has nothing to do with self-merit. Luther convincingly argued that it is faith that is central. The entry point is faith and we are justified by the receiving of Christ's righteousness. Indeed there is nothing we can do to be justified. Christ does it. Faith merely is the means by which we receive Christ's righteousness. Once received through faith then the Spirit works in us to do good works. However, works are not the means of justification but merely the evidence of it.

The view that favours works as a central part have confused what James is saying in his letter. He is saying that if you have real faith then it must show itself in action. That is evidence of the faith. It was always be argued that the Jews believed in works as the means of salvation but Sanders has now shown us that such a view is wrong. Following the works of the law was merely an expression of living out the obligations of the covenant. The idea that works were ever a central part of gaining justification is wrong. It was never such in the time of Paul and never has been.

Answer 2

The role of works is central to the understanding of justification. That is clear from a number of Bible verses. For instance, James makes clear that faith alone is not sufficient, for even demons believe in God. Also James states "A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone". It is true that other verses by Paul are often quoted as proof that justification is by faith alone (sola fide) but this is to misunderstand. Faith is merely the entry point but it is works that guarantee that you remain justified.

Answer 3

Certainly there is some evidence that the role of works is central to the understanding of justification. James makes that clear in his letter when he writes "A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" and "If a man claims to have faith but has no deeds...can such faith save him?" However there are other verses in Paul's letters that suggest that it is faith that has the central role. For instance, Paul writes in Galatians 2 that "... we have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law...". Likewise in Ephesians 2 "...For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast".

So is it faith that is central or is it works? Certainly it seems that Paul presents a picture of Judaism at the time appealing to works of the law as the means of being justified. However, even this has been

challenged recently by Sanders. He argues that the Jews in Paul's time did not believe they could gain access to the covenant by following the law. Rather the works of law were expressions of the fact that Jews already belonged to the covenant people of God and were merely living out their obligations to that covenant. However is Sanders right? If he is, then it is not clear why Paul sees Christianity so superior to Judaism. On balance it seems that faith is the central issue. Faith is the entry point whereas works are the outcome of faith or the means by which you remain justified.

