

You Say Potayto, I Say Potahto: Is the "Faith" of the Bible "Faith Alone?"

By Steve Taylor (Edited by Dave Redick)

One of the difficulties of understanding the Bible's many statements and inferences regarding forgiveness of sin and salvation is that passages appear to say different things. Consider the following verses, all of which relate to salvation:

Acts 16:31

31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household."

Mark 16:16

16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

Luke 24:47

47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Rom 10:9-10

9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

1 Pet 3:21

21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

A careful examination of these representative passages (others could be listed) will indicate that belief, confession with the mouth, repentance, and baptism are all associated in some way with gaining salvation or forgiveness of sins. Are these passages contradictory? Is one

New Testament writer more "pure" in his presentation of the gospel than another? Are some of them wrong? Should we, as many seem to do, pick and choose which we will accept and which we will ignore?

It is hard to accept the proposition that the Bible has contradictions. Such a conclusion nullifies the Bible as the Word of God. How then can these verses possibly be in harmony?

Recently a Christian friend, Steve Taylor, posted a message on a mailing list that I moderate explaining a common form of speech we all use regularly, is used in the Bible, but is not often considered in the context of Bible interpretation. The form of speech is synecdoche. I have reproduced his message below, minus some introductory remarks that were pertinent to the one to whom he was responding.

Dave Redick

Dear _____,

(snip)

I would like to share with you something that I have learned that has helped me much in dealing with scriptures like 1 John 5:1 that says the one who believes is born of God.

As I understand it, the term "believe" in this verse is used as synecdoche. Synecdoche is a very common grammatical tool used by all of us. Synecdoche means the part represents the whole, or sometimes, the whole represents the part.

When we say "Bless your heart" to someone, we don't mean bless only the muscle that pumps your blood, we mean bless "all of you." The heart represents the whole person on which we aim to confer a blessing. It is synecdoche. The part represents the whole.

Some other examples of every day synecdoche are:

- 1) "God bless the hands that prepared the food" = God bless the whole person.
- 2) "It's good to see your face" = It's good to see all of you.
- 3) "I like your wheels" = I like your whole car.

4) "It's good to hear your voice" = It's good to hear all of you (your mind & heart too).

I could multiply the examples, but I'm sure the point is clear. In each example, the part is used to represent the whole. One doesn't have to have a degree in grammar or English to recognize what it means.

Some Biblical examples are:

- 1) "The evening and the morning were the first day" (And all in between) (Gen. 1:5)
- 2) "They have taken away my Lord" (Only his body) (Jn. 20:13)
- 3) "I am not worthy for you to come under my roof" (Into my whole house) (Lk. 7:6)
- 4) "For three transgressions...and for four" (Many transgression (Amos 1:3)
- 5) Forgive "Seventy times seven" (Unlimited number of times) (Mt. 18:22)
- 6) "From the four winds" (Every direction) (Mt. 24:31)
- 7) "Give us our daily bread" (All the necessities) (Mt. 6:11)
- 8) "The gospel...has come to...all the world" (It's gone far, very far)(Col 1:5-6)

I could multiply the examples. They are throughout the entire New Testament. These should suffice to show that the New Testament writers used synecdoche on a regular basis, and expected their readers to understand what they meant - - that the part represented the whole.

The same is true in scripture regarding how one becomes a Christian. The New Testament writers did not need to write every response to the gospel every time they discussed it in order for their readers to know that more was required. It would have been redundant to constantly say, hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized, live a faithful life each time they discussed salvation. In fact it would have made their writing laborious and even would have worked against the point they were trying to make in any particular letter by bogging the reader down.

So the apostles chose, I believe, to simply use certain parts of our total

response to the gospel as synecdoche. The condition stated was used as a part that represented the whole response to the gospel needed to be saved. This is why there is not one single passage in the entire N.T. that states all the responses together. Here are examples that I'm sure you're familiar with:

- 1) "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38) = Parts that represent whole response to gospel that also includes faith, confession, and staying faithful.
- 2) "Believe" (Acts 16:31) - Belief represents whole response to gospel
- 3) "Confess" (Romans 10:9-10) - Confess represents whole response to gospel
- 4) "Repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9) - Repentance represents whole response to gospel
- 5) "Baptism" (1 Pet. 3:21) - Baptism represents whole response to gospel

Again, I could multiply the examples but these should suffice.

So in 1 John 5:1 when "believe" is used to indicate how one is born of God, we must see it as the part representing the whole. It is synecdoche. I am certain that John did not mean to exclude repentance or baptism from the equation. He just did not need to mention them in this letter to make the point he was trying to make. So he chose to use belief as synecdoche to represent the whole response to the gospel. His readers would have immediately recognized it as such, and mentally read in the requirement for repentance, confession and baptism.

Certainly you would not argue that repentance is not needed to be saved since it is not mentioned in 1 John 5:1. I wouldn't argue that belief and repentance aren't necessary because Peter says baptism saves you in 1 Pet. 3:21. Instead, I would say that both writers are using synecdoche.

"Believe" is used more in synecdoche than any other word because faith is involved in all our responses to the gospel for salvation. But this does not mean that other responses to the gospel are somehow excluded. To the contrary, I believe the writers included them in their thoughts

whether or not they included them in their pens.

I hope this helps. I'd appreciate your feedback.

Steve Taylor
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Follow-up notes:

Steve,

Your synecdoche comments are brilliant. The Jews referred to the prophets in the same way, using the first, Isaiah, to stand for all of them because they were in the same group. That is why several quotes are attributed to Isaiah in Scripture that were penned by a lesser known prophet.

The practice was not questioned by Jews, but some in our time wonder what is going on.

Charles Dailey -
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Charles and brothers,

Charles, I am humbled by your comments. Your example of Isaiah being used to represent all the prophets is excellent. "Moses" was also used to represent the law. This is a different kind of synecdoche, but Paul makes use of it in 1 Corinthians where he says "Moses" is read every week in the synagogue. He means the "law" is read, of course.

Synecdoche is a very common grammatical tool used in the Bible. Once recognized it helped me understand so much. The complicated became

simple in dozens of places in scripture.

(snip)

May God bless you.

Steve Taylor

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