

Is Orthodox Christianity 'faith'- based or 'works'- based?

The faith-works divide, especially in the Protestant West, reflects a decisive (and Orthodox believe regretful) innovation in Christian theology beginning in the 16th century. It was largely a reaction against the use of "indulgences" by the Roman Catholic Church and their proper rejection by Martin Luther and the Reformers. The Orthodox Church believes the Reformers's theology went too far however, by driving a wedge between faith and works. The faith-works dichotomy does not exist biblically, or in the eastern Christian spiritual tradition. We are clearly called to "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). But we are also exhorted to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12)". And we are reminded that "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17). Perhaps the most sobering warning comes from Saint Paul who warns us of "the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds" (Rom. 2: 5-6). Orthodox theology and spirituality therefore emphasize a balance between faith and works.