

Confused About Faith And Works?

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (James 2:14-26)

These verses in God’s Word have been repeatedly misunderstood by the lost as well as by some Christians. Roman Catholicism and other religious systems use these verses to promote salvation by good works. Some Christians find these verses controversial because they feel they confuse the Biblical teaching of salvation by faith alone. Some have even argued that these verses contradicted the Apostle Paul’s teaching on justification in Romans and Galatians.

There are no inconsistencies in the Word of God. “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*” (2 Timothy 3:16). To even suggest this, is accusing God of lying and casting doubt upon the infallibility of the Scriptures. “*In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;*” (Titus 1:2). The Word of God is not confusing. “*For God is not the author of confusion,..*” (1 Corinthians 14:33). When you think there is a contradiction, it is your own private interpretation and your lack of understanding of the verse. More studying of God’s Word, seasoned with prayer, is needed so you will be able to rightly divide the Word of truth. “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” (2 Timothy 2:15). Christian, we are commanded to study God’s Word and “*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” (Matthew 4:4)

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of studying the Word of God. The Bible is the believer’s sword, “*which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword*” and is what our shield of faith is made of. “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” (Romans 10:17). “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:*” (1 Peter 2:2). Studying God’s Word will help us to “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*”. (2 Peter 3:18)

When one begins to interpret the Holy Scriptures, it is important that one pays close attention to God’s rules and prerequisite.

The only prerequisite is, “*Ye must be born again*”. “*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*” (1 Corinthians 2:10-16)

For those who are not born again, the best thing you can do is read the Word of God. As you read God’s Word, the Holy Spirit will convict you of your sins and keep revealing to you that, “*Ye must be born again*”. “*And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*” (John 16:8-11). The reason why God has given us His Word is that we may believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. “*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*” (John 20:31). Once you believe, God wants you to know. “*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*” (1 John 5:13)

The exact moment a person is born again, he is sealed by the Holy Spirit and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. *“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,”* (Ephesians 1:13). *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”* (1 Corinthians 3:16). One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit, is to guide the children of God in all truth, which is the Word of the living God. *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth:”* (John 16:13a).

God has given all of us a clear warning: *“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”* (2 Peter 1:20-21). Scripture must harmonize with Scripture; no verse is to be taken out of context. If the interpretation does not harmonize with the rest of Scripture, or if it contradicts any other part of Scripture, then that is a private interpretation. Scripture only has one interpretation but many applications. Let us rightly divide the Word of truth as we look at the proper Biblical interpretation of our text, comparing Scripture with Scripture. The Bible is its own commentary.

Is James indicating in James 2:14-16 that works are needed for salvation and that we must also keep the law? Is James contradicting the Apostle Paul’s teaching in Romans and Galatians pertaining to justification? Paul declares that a man is justified by faith. *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”* (Romans 3:28). The apostle also declares that man is not justified by works of the law. *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in*

Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Galatians 2:16). James affirms that a man is justified by works. *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”* (James 2:24). Is James teaching the opposite of what the Apostle Paul is teaching about Abraham being justified by faith and not works?

The answers to these questions are NO! To interpret these verses to mean one is justified by works or justified by the works of the law is a private interpretation. There are no other verses in Scripture that support this analysis and it does not harmonize with the rest of Scripture. This explanation is contrary to the entire Word of God and denies the sound, biblical teaching of the Doctrine of Salvation. Nowhere in the Bible does it teach that works are needed for one’s salvation. Furthermore, James knew that neither the law nor works could justify or save and preached that at the first church council in Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15. James also warns about trusting in the law. *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”* (James 2:10). There is no salvation in the law. *“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:24-26)

In every dispensation throughout the Word of God, man has always been saved by grace through faith. Man cannot save himself or pay for his own sins no matter how hard he tries. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). *“Forasmuch as ye know that*

ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Romanism and other religions take these verses in James completely out of context and use their own private interpretation to support their false doctrines on salvation, which are contrary to the scriptural teachings of God's plan of salvation. Their false teachings have many believing that by church membership, works, by partaking of the sacraments, etc., they can somehow save themselves and pay for their own sins. No matter how hard they try, their efforts are all in vain and insulting to God. Salvation is not attained by good works. *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;"* (Titus 3:5). Our own righteousness amounts to nothing more than a pile of filthy rags. *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."* (Isaiah 64:6). *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* (2 Corinthians 5:21). *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."* (1 Peter 2:24)

The Lord Jesus Christ, God's spotless Lamb, was the only one able to pay that great sin debt on our behalf. *"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* (1 John 2:2). While Christ was shedding His precious blood upon Calvary's cross, He cried out *"It is finished"*. Redemption is complete; there is no more

sacrifice for sin. Jesus Christ paid the full debt. *“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;”* (Hebrews 10:10-12). We have forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ, not by our works of righteousness. *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:”* (Colossians 1:14).

Dear reader, if you have never trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and have never accepted Him as your personal Saviour, why not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ right now and thou shalt be saved.

We must carefully examine these verses in Scripture and keep in mind that, *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”* (2 Timothy 3:16). The truth does not contradict itself and God’s Word is truth. *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* (John 17:17)

Please do not be deceived. Jesus makes it very clear that if one is trying to obtain salvation by keeping the law or good works, he is a spiritual thief and a robber. One must come to the Lord Jesus Christ and it is only through Him can one be saved. Our salvation is based upon Christ and His sacrificial death on Calvary’s tree. We must all come to the foot of the cross. *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. I am the door:*

by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” (John 10:1,7,9). “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

When the Philippian jailer fell down before Paul and Silas and cried out, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.” (Acts 16:30b-32).* Observe they did not say: you must keep the law, you must do good works prescribed by your religion. “*And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*”! One is saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not by works of righteousness which you have done or will do.

Take the time to read Acts 10 where the Holy Spirit gives us the account of Cornelius, a devout man, who was trusting in his good works and was just as lost as the poor drunkard on the street.

So how can James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, mention faith with works? Let us look at Ephesians 2:8-9. “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*” Verses 8 and 9 make it very clear that we are saved through faith and not of works. Now read verse 10: “*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*”

Pay close attention to Ephesians 2:10. Good works is the product of our salvation. Salvation by faith comes first then followed by good works. It is not the other way around.

Salvation is not a result of keeping the law or good works. The word “works” in Ephesians 2:9 and 10 is the same word that is used in Titus 3:5. *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;”*. Keep in mind that *“works of righteousness”* include: trying to keep the law, baptism, religious rituals and what some call the right kind of works.

Scripture is its own commentary and gives many examples. Before he was saved the Apostle Paul was a Pharisee. He faithfully kept the law and was devout in doing his religious duties. He even had a zeal for God and thought he was pleasing God by persecuting the church and consenting unto Stephen’s death. *“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”* (Philippians 3:4-6).

It was when Rabbi Saul met the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ that he was saved. It was his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that saved him, not his religious works or keeping the law. Now take notice of Paul’s testimony and his life after his salvation.

Paul’s keeping of the law and his religious works did not lead to his salvation. A lost person is a child of the devil and cannot produce good works pleasing to God. *“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth,*

because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:44). “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” (Matthew 7:17-18)

When one is born again, he is a child of God and abides in Christ and he is now able to produce fruit which is pleasing unto the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ explains this in John. *“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” (John 15:5).* It is only when one is born again that he receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that allows him to live a holy and separated life unto God.

We have shown from Scripture that salvation is by faith in Christ alone. Let us now examine the teachings in Romans and Galatians, that a man is justified by faith and not by works, and how it harmonizes with the teachings in the Epistle of James. We will see that there are no contradictions in God’s Word. Those who have suggested that there are do err, not knowing the Scriptures or have not taken the time to *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)*

“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.” (Galatians 3:8, 11)

“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,” (Romans 4:1-6).

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:” (Romans 5:1).

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had

received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (James 2:14-25)

The key that unlocks the suggested controversy is found in Romans 4:2 and James 2:22 and 24.

“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.” (Roman 4:2)

“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”

“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”. (James 2:22,24)

Observe the phrase in Romans 4:2: *“but not before God”*, and the phrases in James 2:22: *“Seest thou”* and verse 24: *“Ye see”*. Romans is dealing with the believers standing before God. James is dealing with the believers standing before man, our outward testimony.

God, not man, knows our hearts; man can only judge what he can see on the outside. *“But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)*. All man can see is our works; that is why Jesus said, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)*. God can see Ephesians 2:8-9, but man can only see Ephesians 2:10. The two illustrations the Holy Spirit uses are Abraham and Rahab (both are mentioned in

Hebrews 11 which has been called the Faith Hall of Fame Chapter).

Notice the definition of faith: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* (Hebrews 11:1). God can see our faith but man can only see our actions which are a result of our faith.

In Hebrews 11 we have an account of the faith of Abraham.

8 “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure”.

God, who is all knowing, knew in eternity past that Abraham would believe and obey. God knows our hearts and thoughts and knows if we are truly born again. Many times when I preach I will say, “You can fool me, you can fool those around you, but you cannot fool God”. How do we see Abraham’s faith? We see Abraham’s faith by his actions, by his works.

We see from Scripture that Abraham obeyed God and left his father’s country and because of Abraham’s faith, he obeyed

God and offered up Isaac. Abraham did not just talk the talk but he also walked the walk. His actions backed up his words. Abraham was not just a hearer of the Word, but also a doer. What would you think of Abraham if he did not obey God by leaving his father's house and offering up Isaac? Would you begin to doubt his faith? "*Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*" (Matthew 7:20)

Rahab's faith was made known by her works when she received the spies. "*By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*" (Hebrews 11:31). Again, what would you think about Rahab's faith if she did not receive the spies?

James is not contradicting Romans or Galatians, nor is he stating that works are needed for salvation. In studying the Epistle of James, you will notice that he is writing to believers. James is admonishing believers to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. Their actions speak louder than their words. There are those who claim to be born again but their works show just the opposite. They live and act just like the lost. They claim to be born again but there seems to be no difference in their lives; they still do the same things that they always did. There is no change. If one is truly born again there is a difference. "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

This is what James is referring to when he mentions faith without works. Don't tell me you are born again when your works show otherwise. Christians are expected to live a holy life that is pleasing unto God and should be noticeable to all men. "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye*

present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:1-2)

Scripture gives us examples of those who walked the walk. The prophet Daniel and the three Hebrew children showed faith by their works. Daniel had a consistent testimony and no one had any doubt that Daniel was a believer.

God’s Word teaches we are saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone and not by works of righteousness which we have done. It is salvation that produces the good works. Hell is filled with those who tried to obtain salvation by good works: doing the best they could, joining a church, partaking of the sacraments and trying to pay for their own sins. Heaven is filled with sinners saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are justified by faith. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*

Dear reader, what category do you fall into? Are you unsaved pretending to talk the talk but not really walking the walk? Keep in mind your actions speak louder than your words. Are you a born again believer that others around you can see your faith by your actions? *“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:” (2 Corinthians 3:2).*

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)