

Study of the book of James – 4

Faith & works (An active faith) - James 2:14-26

One would confront an apparent contradiction between the teachings of Paul and James on the subject of faith and works in this scripture portion. Look at the scriptures below. Paul said that justification comes “by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law” (Galatians 2:16) while James said that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Paul mentions that Abraham was justified by faith in Romans 4 and James mentions that Abraham was justified by works in James 2:21.

We see both Paul and James mention Abraham as an example of one who was justified. Both quoted from the same scripture, Genesis 15:6, which says that Abraham “believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness. (see Romans 4:3,22; Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23)

<p>Paul said that <u>justification comes “by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law”</u> (Galatians 2:16)</p> <p>For we hold that one is <u>justified by faith</u> apart from (without) works of the law. Romans 3:28</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Justified by faith (Paul)</p>	<p>James said that “<u>by works a man is justified, and not by faith only</u>” (James 2:24)</p> <p>Was not Abraham our father <u>justified by works</u> when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? James 2:21</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Justified by works (James)</p>
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There seems to be a contradiction here. Let’s find answers from the word of God itself. Let us carefully look at the context it is written in.

First, we need to know that:

- Bible, word of God will never be contradictory. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors to write down the word of God. All scripture is breathed out by God. It is the representation of God’s power and wisdom. He will never allow authors to write what they feel like and make it a controversy. There is always a perfect harmony among the scriptures. Deeper study will make one appreciate that scriptures are in perfect harmony and each one is connected.
- Paul & James knew each other. They were familiar with each other’s teachings. Jerusalem council led by Paul, Peter and James in Acts 15. James stood up & endorsed the very teaching of these men. In Galatians 2:9, Paul mentions that James along with Peter and John (also called pillars) gave him the right hand of fellowship.
- They shared a common experience. Both had encounter with the resurrected saviour.

The background of Paul’s writing:

Paul wrote to the Galatians in response to a doctrinal controversy created by Jewish Christians. They were teaching false doctrine that Gentile converts must be circumcised and should observe the ritual requirements of the law of Moses in order to be saved.

The book of Acts refers to similar teachers. We see In Acts 10, Peter, received a revelation that Gentiles who had faith in God (Acts 10:35) and were to be received into the Church by baptism, without first having to convert to Judaism by undergoing the ritual of circumcision. There arose a commotion among people

In Acts 15, we see Jerusalem council led by Paul, Peter, James: The council of Apostles and elders that met in Jerusalem rejected the teaching of the Judaizers and affirmed that Gentile members of the Church did not need to be circumcised or observe other rituals of the law of Moses (see Acts 15:24–29). They stood up & spoke that God accepts the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit just like Jews. God has no distinction.

This is the very problem that Paul addressed in Galatians. Saints in Galatia were quickly beginning to embrace a different gospel message taught by people who were perverting the gospel of Christ (***“They constrain you to be circumcised,” Paul wrote (Galatians 6:12). They had also convinced the Galatians that they needed to observe the Jewish Sabbath, Jewish feasts, and the Jewish calendar: “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years,” Paul noted, adding, “I am afraid [for] you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” Paul continued, “If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing” (Galatians 4:10–11; 5:2).***

Paul understood that in this crisis, the Galatian Saints were at risk of losing eternal blessings.

He reminded them from (***Deuteronomy 27:26***), ***Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God’s book of law. (Galatians 3:10)***. To keep the entire law means—all its rituals, all its prescribed sacrifices, all its dietary regulations, all 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions given in the Torah and taught by the rabbis. Failure to keep just one commandment was failure to keep the whole law (see Galatians 5:3), and no one successfully kept them all:

If you really want to please God or be justified, you should follow every single law. ***Galatians 3:11 So, it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.***

Galatians 3: 1-7 he says, O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched (deceived, tricked) you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith (not by works of the law), preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Paul taught that the way God had provided for people to become free from the curse of sin was through the Atonement of Jesus Christ: ***“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He became a curse for us so that the blessing of Abraham might come on us Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:13–14)***

He argued that Gentile Christians who were choosing to be circumcised were in effect saying that Christ's suffering had no saving effect: ***"For if righteousness (justification) come by the law (works of the law), then Christ is dead in vain" (Galatians 2:21).***

Galatians 2:16 Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. Paul used the term 'works' three times here, but never once by itself. Each time it was part of the phrase "the works of the law" [ergōn nomou].

Paul would explain you are justified, made right with God by the finished work of Jesus on the cross. He took all your sin; and you get all His righteousness. Not because of your works so that no one boasts. **God makes you right with Him by FAITH ALONE.**

It was in this context that Paul wrote about being justified by faith and not by works. When Paul refers to "work(s)" in this context he is specifically referring to the works of Moses' Law. The Judaizing Hebrew Christians were trying to hold to, and bind on Gentile Christians, the law of Moses. Paul is pointing out in this context (Romans 2-11), that they could not be faithful to God by following the fulfilled law of Moses.

Salvation is not our works, but the complete work of God. He did it. It is through the finished work of Christ ***Ephesians 2:8,9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.***

Romans 11:6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Now that we are justified / declared righteous before God, does that mean we have all the license to sin?

Paul answers this in Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! (Meganoto – almost like profanity, used with greater latitude) How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

The indwelling & Empowering Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit that dwells within us, helps us to walk in newness of life. He changes us. He gives us the desire to lead a holy life not by rules and regulations. I want to live a holy life because I love Him. Holiness needs to flow out of love not out of obligation. Because I love God, I want to do what pleases my heavenly Father. Trust in the Holy Spirit to do what pleases the Father. Not relying on my holiness but on His grace.

Living by the Spirit's power: Galatians 5:16 Be directed by the Holy Spirit then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil. Two forces are constantly fighting with each other.

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.

22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. 25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

Works are not an addition to faith but the expression / result of faith.

- Justified by faith, saved, set apart, you are set free now. **Use your freedom to love and serve one another. Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.**
- **Faith expressing itself in love : Galatians 5:6 For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.**

Genuine faith shows itself in love. It is not passive and inactive.

- **A Loveless faith is useless:**
1 Corinthians 13:2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.

That is what James is talking about.

A faith that works out / expresses itself/ displays/ manifests in love/ good works
(Work that displays your faith, verification of faith/ what you believed.)

James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Mere kind and religious words do not help the poor. Nice words are not enough in some situations. If people are starving, they do not listen to the message. A person starving cannot eat words. Words do not clothe the body. Lovely sentiments without actions are utterly unfruitful. Faith without works is dead.

Galatians 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

1 John 3:17-19, "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹ And by this we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him."

Mathew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Titus 2:14 Christians are to be "zealous for good works"

Titus 3:1 Ready for every good work"

Good works/ deeds reflect Christ's life in us and flowing through us, these deeds being initiated and energized by the Spirit, bringing glory to the Father. Not arising out of obligation or to make us look good. Deed is not good until it brings glory to God / done in faith.

He does not save us by works but unto "good works.

Did James believe that we are saved by works? No

He acknowledges God as the source, giver, one who chose us and brought us forth. We were born again by the grace of God. (agrees with Paul)

James 1: 17,18 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

He not only chose us but chose us to be rich in faith and made us heirs of the Kingdom.

James believes we don't earn salvation, but it is our inheritance because we are heirs in Christ. We don't need to work to earn our salvation. Heirs don't work to get their inheritance; they simply receive it because of who their parents are. God the father gave it to us.

Faith that expresses itself / manifests itself is an active faith: In God's Word, principle and application always walk hand in hand. J I Packer says "What saves is faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone"

V. 17-19 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (nekros).

¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. 20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless ?

nekrós (an adjective, derived from nekys, "a corpse, a dead body") – dead; literally, "what lacks life"; dead; (figuratively) not able to respond to impulses, or perform functions (unable, ineffective, dead, powerless; unresponsive to life-giving influences (opportunities); inoperative to the things of God.

V. 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead

V. 21 – 26 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Faith and works are partners in labor, working together at the same time. By offering Isaac on an altar, Abraham became the “friend of God” (2:23). Abraham’s faith and his works were partners.

So Abraham’s faith was in the God of resurrection.

He knew God Himself personally (Romans 4:19-21).

Abraham believed that God was able to solve his sexual deadness and give him a child even at his advanced age in life. He believed that even though he sacrificed Isaac, God would raise Isaac from the dead to keep His covenant with Abraham (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham’s faith matured by works. He moved from believing that God would deal with his sexual deadness to being confident that He would raise his son Isaac from the dead. His faith grew and developed. This does not imply that his faith was faulty, but simply that it was made perfect. He developed his faith by exercising it.

Each time we take God at His Word, we demonstrate that God is trustworthy. With each time we believe Him, our faith grows stronger. Taking action on our faith builds our faith.

The word “friend” means someone loved, dear, or friendly. A friend is someone who shares intimate concerns. It is different from associates who do not share those same things. God especially loved Abraham because of this obedience. Obedience is evidence of faith. God declared Abraham His friend when he acted out his faith.

Then what does James mean when he says we are justified by works?

24 You see that a person is justified (vindicated) by works and not by faith alone.

People justified (vindicated) Abraham’s faith by the work of offering Isaac (2:21; Genesis 22) on an altar may be as much as forty years after his conversion (Genesis 15:6). God is not the Author of justification in this verse but men.

Remember that the word “**justify**” (**dikaioo**) has two basic meanings: 1) to declare righteous and 2) to vindicate.

- ❖ **The first meaning carries the idea of acquittal (free of charge).** God judicially declares us as perfectly righteous before His high bar of justice. When we are justified, we are declared righteous positionally (before God we are righteous). It is not based on what we do. It is one time event unlike sanctification which is a continual process. **Paul uses this.** Gen 15:6 (first scenario of Abraham's life)

***Rom 3:24, 27, "...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
Rom 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Rom 4:2, 4:5, Gal 2:16; 3:8, 24; Titus 3:7)***

- ❖ **The second idea of "justify" is vindication/ proving righteousness/ verify.** This is the sense that James uses "justified" in this verse. Abraham supremely **proved** his past relation to God by offering up Isaac after his salvation (Gen. 22:3). Works verified Abraham's faith.

He had been declared righteous by faith in ***Genesis 15:6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness ; but was shown to be righteous (before men) in Genesis 22, by his work - his willingness to offer Isaac. This "work" was the visible manifestation to men.***

Genesis 15:6 -- Abraham had been justified by faith and declared righteous by God on the basis of his faith, not on the basis of his works

James 2:21 Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (NLT)

James 2:24 You see that a person is justified (vindicated/ shown to be right) by works and not by faith alone.

James 2:25 And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified (shown to be righteous) by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Rahab believed in God almost 40 years before the spies came to her house (Joshua 2:9-13; 6:22-25). Rahab believed that the Lord of Israel was God when He delivered the Jews from the Egyptians. God saved her soul when she believed that. She believed to the point of risking her life by hiding the spies.

James uses a woman of bad reputation to demonstrate the grace of God in her life. Rahab who was a prostitute and a Gentile stands in huge contrast to Abraham, the first Jew, and the father of faith.

Summary :

There is no contradiction between Paul and James on justification. James and Paul go together. Like two sides of the same coin, they don't conflict with each other; they complement each other. Both teach us something vital. Paul looks at what goes on internally; James talks about the external results.

Paul says, "We're saved by faith." James says, "This is what saving faith looks like." Paul looks at justification from God's viewpoint, and James looks at it from man's viewpoint. From God's viewpoint, He declares us as righteous. Only Christ could do the doing in this. When Paul says 'we are justified by faith and not by works'. He means – God declares us to be right by the finished work of Christ. Not our works. Salvation not earned.

When Paul makes his case for justification by faith, he cites the beginning of Abraham's walk with God in *Genesis 15:5–6*: “*And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*”

The justification James has in mind comes much later in Abraham's life, recorded in *Genesis 22:12*: when Abraham's faith was tested by asking him to sacrifice Isaac .

Paul and James are citing two different times in Abraham's life, events separated by 25 years. They aren't referring to the same thing.

The works of Abraham that James mentions were a result of justification which came by faith few decades earlier. Abraham was not being saved again. Rather, he was showing evidence of his salvation. He was being confirmed in the justification by faith that had already been accomplished years before.

Abraham's faith was no passive, intellectual exercise. He proved his faith to God. The words of the text show this to be true: “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” God witnessed Abraham's faith first-hand, as it were. It was demonstrated. That's why James concludes, “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’”

Abraham's obedience regarding Isaac was visible proof that God's earlier declaration of his faith was accurate and well deserved. Abraham's actions fulfilled God's word, demonstrating his friendship with God.

James speaks to the man who is all talk and no action. His simple message is that true salvation always proves itself. That's why he asks, “What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?” The apostle John echoes the same sentiment: “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him.”

When James says ‘we are justified by works’ . He means our faith is proven/ vindicated/ verified to be legitimate because our works displays our faith. Works is the proof of our faith.

Prayer:

Can we re-examine ourselves? Is our faith dormant and passive or *Living and active*? Ask the Holy Spirit to activate our faith and take it to the next level. We are called to be the epistles of Christ. We are called to be God's representatives in our words, action, and deed. God did not save us by works but unto good works.