

The Relationship Between Faith and Works:
A Comparison of James 2:24 and Ephesians 2:8-10

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*To My Father
In Loving Memory*

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May 11, 1923—August 9, 2005

*Who Dedicated His Life To Loving His Family
“Family Comes First”*

I Miss You!

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Introduction

The whole Christian life is characterized by the grace of God. The scriptures explicitly teach salvation is by grace and that no one will be declared righteous by the law.¹ Although this statement is true, it does not fully describe the Gospel as the scriptures teach. There is a faulty Protestant² doctrine that, on the one side, has eliminated works altogether. This false Protestant teaching upholds that a person can be saved without evidence of regeneration. Those who embrace this doctrine would claim that God loves His children “no matter what,” and since God’s love is not based on anything man has done, they deduce that good works are of no value. This perception of the Gospel is dangerous because it can leave a false sense of salvation while it denies the practical result of saving faith.

While true Protestant teaching of soteriology has eliminated all works as a cause of salvation, it has not eliminated works altogether. Therefore, many wrongly claim, on the other side, that a Christian must do good works in order to be saved or to maintain God’s blessing. God’s approval is dependent on the works performed by man. This sense of the Gospel is also dangerous because it can result in a false sense of salvation while it denies the grace of the Gospel.

What is the proper place of works in the life of a Christian? Are good works necessary for salvation? Jesus made it clear that salvation by faith will be reflected by a

¹ Rom. 3:20.

² The term Protestant is used in the most generic sense. It is not used to mean the teachings of the Protestant Reformation of Luther or Calvin.

change in lifestyle. He said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). He also said, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). The teachings of Jesus are clear—works must be demonstrated in the life of the Christian. Dr. James M. Boice commenting on the place of works in the Christian life wrote, “In my opinion, this is one of the most neglected (and most essential) teachings in the evangelical church today.”³ This teaching is of great relevance because one can easily fall into the error of antinomianism on the one side or legalism on the other.

Thesis Statement

The task of distinguishing the proper role of works in the Christian life is essential for a healthy understanding of the Gospel. The purpose of this work is to establish the proper place of good works in the life of the believer as they relate to faith. Historically, the Epistle of James has been under fire for its seemingly contradictory discussion on the relationship between faith and works, especially in 2:24, with Paul’s teaching, which has been the “standard” in Protestant theology. This work investigates the relationship between faith and works in James 2:24 and Ephesians 2:8-10; and it contrasts these two passages to synthesize the two perspectives into an orthodox understanding of this relationship. The approach involves a biblical, theological, and historical aspect.

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations Of The Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 426.

General Survey of the Thesis

Chapter 1 is a literature review that will survey the ideas and trends that give shape to this area of study. Chapter 2 will focus on the Apostle James as represented by James 2:24, while chapter 3 will focus on the Apostle Paul as represented by Ephesians 2:8-10. Each chapter will include: (1) the historical and cultural background that prompted the writing of the Epistle; (2) the general biblical context of each passage while focusing on James 2:14-26 in chapter 2 and Ephesians 2:1-10 in chapter 3; (3) the definition of the terms “faith” and “works” from the given context of each passage; (4) the content of each passage; (5) the relationship between faith and works as represented by James and Paul. Chapter 4 will give a historical outlook on the development of the relationship between faith and works by investigating St. Augustine, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. St. Augustine will represent the thought as developed in the early 5th century. John Calvin will represent the mature Reformation view in the 16th century and Jonathan Edwards will represent the Puritan view of the 18th century. Chapter 5 will synthesize these two perspectives as represented by James and Ephesians into an orthodox understanding of the relationship between faith and works while contrasting James and Paul. Chapter 6 will give a conclusion.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The relationship between faith and works is directly related to the doctrines of justification and sanctification. The contrast of these topics in James and Paul has been much debated. Luther, who is likely the most famous for his view of *James*, did not consider this book to be canonical.¹ Luther placed *James* along with *Hebrews* and *Revelation* at the end of the New Testament, which was published in 1522. These books were a type of supplement, which were not numbered in the table of contents. Tasker quoting Ropes' translation of Luther writes:

In fine, Saint John's Gospel and his first Epistle, Saint Paul's Epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Saint Peter's Epistle, --these are the books which show thee Christ, and teach thee everything that is needful and blessed for thee to know even though thou never see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore is Saint James's Epistle a right strawy Epistle in comparison with them, for it has no gospel character to it.²

Luther did not consider the book to be all "straw," but Luther's struggle was that it has "no gospel character." The book has a controversial view on the relationship between faith and works and he saw the book as antithetical to Paul. Luther understood the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone to be in contrast to James who ascribed justification by works. James 2:24 seemed to violate the New Testament teaching. A man had to live in accordance with the law to be justified.

Current Trends

On this side of the debate, there are those who conclude that the theology of James and Paul are in stark contrast and cannot be synchronized. Many recent scholars

¹ William Barclay, 6.

² R. V. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 14.

share Luther's conclusion. In modern scholarship, J. T. Sanders states that James "misunderstands Paul," and "opposes the writings of Paul," and "rejects Pauline tradition."³ Ropes says, "James shows no comprehension of what Paul actually meant by his formula...and he heartily dislikes it."⁴ He continues and states that Paul "would have deplored as utterly superficial and inadequate James's mode of stating the conditions of justification."⁵ Bultmann, along this same line writes, "Paul's concept of faith is...utterly misunderstood. For Paul would certainly have agreed with the proposition that a faith without works is dead (2:17, 26) [Galatians 5:6] but never in the world with the thesis that faith works along with works (2:22)."⁶ Many other scholars express similar views.⁷

On the other side of the debate, there are those who conclude that James and Paul are united in their theology. Moo comments, "On this point [the concept of faith in James], James and Paul are in complete agreement." He further writes regarding the place of works in justification, "Understood in their own contexts, and with careful attention to the way each is using certain key words, it can be seen that James and Paul are making complementary, not contradictory, points."⁸ Calvin also saw no contradiction. He wrote, "I, however, am inclined to receive it [The Epistle of James] without controversy, because I see no just cause for rejecting it. For what seems in the

³ Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 121-122.

⁴ "his formula" refers to Justification by Faith Alone.

⁵ James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916), 35-6.

⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 2:163.

⁷ E. C. Blackman, *The Epistle of James* (London: SCM, 1957), 96; J. C. Becker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 251; S. Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 132-3; and G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 153-4.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 45-6.

second chapter to be inconsistent with the doctrine of free justification, we shall easily explain in its own place.”⁹ Many other scholars also accept this view.¹⁰

This thesis views the scriptures as infallible and will stand firm in the genuine solidarity of James and Paul and takes the position that there is no contradiction between the theologies of these two Apostles. The theology of those scholars that sets these two against each other will be rejected. While this work acknowledges the apparent tension between the writings of each, it will validate the given position.

In the area of the lordship of Christ, there has been the debate between Zane Hodges and John MacArthur. Hodges represents the “free grace” view and MacArthur represents the “lordship theology” view.¹¹ This controversy is important because it addresses the nature of salvation including the nature of saving faith. There are a variety of topics within this debate, but only those immediately relevant will be mentioned.

Advocates of Hodges’ view are Michael Cocoris, Charles Ryrie, Bob Wilkin, and the Grace Evangelical Society.¹² The “free grace” position maintains that faith can stand without personal evidence. The aspects of repentance, good works, and commitment to the lordship of Christ are absent. Faith is simply believing biblical truth. Hodges writes,

A Greek reader who met the words “he who believes in me has everlasting life,” would understand the word “believe” exactly as we do. The reader most certainly would not understand this word to imply submission, surrender, repentance or anything else of this sort. For those readers, as for us, “to believe,” meant “to believe.”

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*. trans., John Owen. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 276.

¹⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 160-71; James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 34-36; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology Of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 638-9; W. J. Burghardt and T. C. Lawler eds., *Saint Augustine on Faith and Works* trans. Gregory J. Lombardo (New York: Newman Press, 1988), 3-4.

¹¹ Millard J. Erickson, “Lordship Theology: The Current Controversy,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (1991): 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

Surely it is one of the conceits of modern theology to suppose that we can define away simple terms like “belief” and “unbelief” and replace their obvious meanings with complicated elaborations.¹³

Faith for Hodges is belief; he further writes, “The Bible knows nothing about an intellectual faith as over against some other kind of faith (like emotional or volitional). What the Bible does recognize is the obvious distinction between faith and unbelief!”¹⁴ Hodges never fully defines faith, but he describes it when he writes, “What faith really is, in biblical language, is receiving the testimony of God. It is an *inward conviction* that what God says to us in the Gospel is true. That—and that alone—is saving faith.”¹⁵

“Free grace” advocates embrace faith that stands alone; a faith independent from repentance, good works, and submission to the lordship of Christ warrants salvation. Hodges rejects and views as heresy the notion that a regenerate person will necessarily perform good works because of his regeneration; he also rejects the view that if one claims to be a Christian but does not perform good works, he has forfeited his eternal life or never possessed it.¹⁶ Faith alone justifies the sinner before God, but this does not mean that the sinner has fellowship with God. Good works sustain fellowship, but they are not required as evidence of salvation. Hodges separates these two aspects of the Christian life in the same way he separates faith from Christ’s lordship. Fellowship requires repentance and good works while salvation does not.

Hodges’ understanding of the book of *James* is that James is not teaching that works are necessary for the saving of the soul from hell. He understands James to be speaking of those works that save from the immediate effects of sin. He writes, “It is easy to see how obedience to the word of God can ‘save the life’ from the death-dealing

¹³ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1989), 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶ Millard Erickson, 8.

outcome of sin.”¹⁷ Also, regarding the book of *James*, he explains that the role of works never justifies man before God, but rather before man. It is the way by which salvation is seen by others.

James Montgomery Boice, J. I. Packer, and John Piper support MacArthur’s stand on “lordship salvation.”¹⁸ MacArthur’s view does not separate the call to salvation and fellowship with God. MacArthur writes, “The Gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer.”¹⁹ In his view, faith is obedience to Jesus. MacArthur understands faith to be a gift of God, which includes repentance.²⁰ Describing faith, MacArthur writes, “The faith God begets includes both volition and the ability to comply with His will (cf. Phil. 2:13). In other words, faith encompasses obedience.”²¹

In this view, saving faith is obedience to Christ. Faith is demonstrated by submission to the lordship of Christ. MacArthur rejects the position that separates saviorhood from lordship. He describes Jesus’ ministry by writing, “He made it clear that obedience to divine authority is a prerequisite of entry into the Kingdom. Clearly, His lordship is an integral part of the message of salvation.”²² This view understands faith as an obedient submission to the Lord that is characterized by fellowship and good works that resulted from regeneration.

These two views are trying to maintain a biblical understanding of the nature of faith. Hodges is concerned with the mixing or adding of works to grace for salvation. He

¹⁷ Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1981), 24.

¹⁸ Millard Erickson, 9.

¹⁹ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 21.

²⁰ Millard Erickson, 10.

²¹ John MacArthur, 173.

²² *Ibid.*, 204.

maintains that salvation is by faith alone and any requirement of works or even their necessity as a fruit of faith violates the integrity of the Gospel. MacArthur insists that works necessarily flow from faith and where there are no works, salvation is uncertain. For him, if works are not linked with faith then the full scope of the Gospel is not maintained.

From the literature surveyed above, we can conclude that the relationship between faith and works is an issue that has been much debated since the Reformation (and earlier as discussed in the Historical Review below). There are those scholars who have placed James and Paul on opposing sides, while others have concluded that the two Apostles are in complete harmony and are simply stressing different aspects of the nature of saving faith. Also, there are the writings of Hodges and MacArthur that demonstrate the continual dialogue which continues to debate this topic. This work is aimed at continuing the investigation of the true nature of biblical faith and its relationship to good works as it compares James and Paul.

Chapter 2: James

*“So let our lips and lives express The holy Gospel we profess; So let
our works and virtues shine, To prove the doctrine all divine.”*
- Isaac Watts-

General Background

Historical/Cultural

The Epistle refers to its audience as “the twelve tribes scattered among the nation” (James 1:1). James addressed Jewish believers of the Diaspora—Jews living outside of Palestine, although Gentiles have been associated with the dispersion in the New Testament.¹ This address describes an audience that is most certainly Jewish.²

The language used supports this claim. The use of the terms “law” and “synagogue” and “Old Testament and Jewish metaphors”³ as well as the use of the Jewish *Shema*⁴ or confession of “one God,” represents Jewish doctrine. Also, the New Testament describes James as a minister to the Jews.⁵

It seems that this Epistle was composed prior to the Council of Jerusalem,⁶ which occurred in A.D. 48 or 49. This date seems likely because James makes no connection with or reference to the Council when addressing relevant issues⁷ discussed during the

¹ 1 Pet 1:1.

² D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction To The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 414-5; C. Ryan Jenkins, “Faith and Works in Paul and James,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 71; Douglas J. Moo, 30; James B. Adamson, 51.

³ Carson, Moo, and Morris, 415.

⁴ The Jewish *Shema* came from Deut 6:4.

⁵ Gal 2:9.

⁶ Acts 15; Carson, Moo, and Morris, 414.

⁷ works of righteousness and Gospel

Council. If the date is correct, *James* would have been written no later than the mid 40's⁸ making *James* the first New Testament book written.⁹

James was written for those who did not understand the relationship between “faith” and “works.”¹⁰ James had concern for those who professed faith in Christ but lived lives that did not “justify” their profession.¹¹ His audience was antinomian, living as if obedience to the Law were not necessary nor of any value. They understood that salvation by “faith” meant the Law was “done away with.” They misunderstood that by faith in Christ’s death, the penalty of Law was removed, not its guide for living. Jenkins describing the church writes,

Therefore James’ remarks are best understood in light of the historical situation he was addressing, namely, a pervasive antinomianism that took undue advantage of the law of liberty in the Gospel. In response to this, James sought to demonstrate that true religion before God (1:27) involves a validation of one’s profession of faith by a demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit (2:14-26).¹²

In view of the Gospel’s annihilation of the Law¹³ and the Jewish struggle between libertine excess and legalism, it is proper to interpret *James* as “the fine line” between antinomianism and legalism. James’ teaching is that true faith will be demonstrated through its display of works.¹⁴

General Context of James 2:14-26

James discusses the necessity of the testing of faith.¹⁵ The faith that perseveres is “mature and complete, not lacking anything” (1:4). James in defining pure religion says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”

⁸ Carson, Moo, and Morris, 414.

⁹ C. Ryan Jenkins, 71-2; R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith That Works* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 15.

¹⁰ “Faith” and “works” is also referred to as “Law and Gospel.”

¹¹ C. Ryan Jenkins, 73.

¹² *Ibid.*, 72.

¹³ Col 2:14-15.

¹⁴ See verses 2:18, 21, 24; C. Ryan Jenkins, 73

¹⁵ Jas 1:3.

(1:27). Moo, describing verses 14-26 writes, “This passage is the climax of James’ plea for a ‘pure religion’ that vindicates itself in action. It is a text that sustains a single theological argument throughout.”¹⁶ The context of this entire passage is the nature of “pure and faultless” religion.

Verses 14-26 will be divided into three sections: verses 14-17, 18-19, and 20-26. The first section begins with a question about faith without works and ends with the summary—“faith by itself...is dead.” The second section is a discussion with a diatribe or opponent.¹⁷ The third section demonstrates that faith without works is useless.

2:14-17

Discussing the nature of faith, James begins, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” This is a question James was likely to encounter repeatedly.¹⁸ This question reveals his thesis—faith without works is dead.¹⁹ The present subjunctive verbs in verse 14a²⁰ imply that the action is repetitive; meaning that James’ opponent repeatedly speaks of his belief, but his faith is void of any acts of charity.²¹ James never states that his opponent possesses true faith; he only points out that his opponent claims to have faith.²² The Greek text uses the article with the word faith²³ in verses 14, 17, and 20 referring to the specific faith mentioned.²⁴

¹⁶ Douglas J. Moo, 99.

¹⁷ This “opponent” is either real or imaginary and is spoken in the singular to refute anyone who imagined they had faith while their life is void of works.

¹⁸ Robert H. Stein, “Saved by Faith [Alone]” in Paul Verses “Not saved by Faith Alone” in James,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4 (2000): 9.

¹⁹ James’ thesis implies that true faith must be accompanied by works.

²⁰ λεγει “claim” and εχει “have”

²¹ Nigel Turner, *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 114.

²² The word “claims” in the NIV is translated from λεγει meaning “says.”

²³ η πιστις

²⁴ Douglas J. Moo, 100.

James is not teaching that faith does not save. He is teaching that this kind of faith²⁵ will not save. When James asks, “Can such faith save him?” the final judgment is in view. The Greek text demands the negative answer to the question.²⁶ This faith will not prove profitable on the Day of Judgment; it cannot save because it is useless. Lorenzen states, “Works are necessary for salvation.”²⁷ James does not imply that works save rather than faith; he is expressing their union.

James’ thesis²⁸ is illustrated in verses 15-16. He depicts a Christian brother or sister who is in need of some basic necessities²⁹ and a parishioner noticing says, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but offers no help. “Without clothing” most likely means inadequately dressed or lack of outer clothing; and “daily food” refers to food needed for the day.³⁰ The “someone”³¹ who claims to have faith is associated with the church because James refers to a “brother” or “sister” who is in need.³² The man’s faith is a mock “faith” for it is void of love for others in Christ

His faith offers only empty words and does not attempt to help. The verbs “be warmed” and “be fed” are in the form of either the middle or passive tense. The response of the “Christian” is “keep yourself warm and well fed” or as a prayer, “may you be warm and well fed” respectively.³³ Whether in the middle or passive is of little relevance since the point is that the poor person walked away needy. James is not condemning well meaning words; he is condemning the lack of provision for the needs of others. James

²⁵ This “kind” of faith is a profession without works. This faith does not save.

²⁶ Thornwald Lorenzen, “Faith without Works does not count before God! James 2:14-26,” *Expository Times* 89 (1978): 231.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ James’ thesis is faith without works is dead and that true faith necessarily will produce works.

²⁹ A brother or sister is in need of clothes and daily food.

³⁰ Robert H. Stein, 9.

³¹ τίς in verses 14 and 16 translates “someone” or “anyone.”

³² Douglas J. Moo, 102.

³³ Ibid., 103.

concludes, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” James is exploiting the faith mentioned in 14. If someone claims to have faith and does not love others, the point is clear, “as long as the church fails to provide the needy with the ‘necessary things,’ nothing good has been done.”³⁴ The church that is apathetic to the needs of others is a dead church, which is not a “church” at all.³⁵

James is contrasting “true faith” and “counterfeit faith.” True faith is united with works of love and counterfeit faith is void of works. Counterfeit faith is really no faith at all, just as a corpse is not a man.³⁶ While counterfeit faith has form, “it lacks force—outwardly inoperative, because inwardly dead.”³⁷

2:18-19

James switches from an indifferent faith to a practical faith by the use of a diatribe. James writes, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.” In Dibelius’ opinion, this is the hardest verse in the entire New Testament to interpret.³⁸ This passage is difficult because it is unclear who is speaking and how it is to be understood. Is the speaker James’ friend or an opponent? Where does James’ reply begin—18b, 19, or 20?³⁹ There are three arguments when trying to identify the speaker.

(1) The person is a supporter of James who heaps doubt on faith without works. The “you” is the false believer and the “I” is his or James’ view. This ally of James

³⁴ Mark Proctor, “Faith, Works, and the Christian Religion in James 2:14-26,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 69 (1997): 312.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 313.

³⁶ Jas 2:26.

³⁷ James B. Adamson, 124.

³⁸ Martin Dibelius, *James* (Hermeneia: Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 154.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

argues against the possibility of the dichotomy between faith and works.⁴⁰ Faith or works independently are not acceptable alternatives to salvation. The “you” cannot demonstrate faith because he does not have works; but the “T” can and does demonstrate his faith by what he does.⁴¹ This interpretation has the pronouns consistent throughout the argument. The “you” is always the one with empty faith, while the “T” is the ally of James.⁴²

(2) It is an objector who doubts the faith of James. This interpretation will read verse 18 to say, “Do you, James, really have faith?” Then James responds with, “I have works; you cannot show me your faith since you have none, but I will show you mine by what I do.”⁴³

(3) It is an opponent of James who argues that faith and works can exist separately. Some Christians will have faith while others will have works. Barclay writes:

Faith is a fine thing; and works are fine things. They are both perfectly genuine manifestations of real religion. But the one man does not necessarily possess both. One man will have faith and another works. Well, then, you carry on with your work and I will carry on with my faith; and we are both being truly religious in our own way.⁴⁴

This objector claims that faith or works are each expressions of true religion. The New English Bible translates this verse in this light; it says, “But someone may object: ‘Here is one who claims to have faith and another who points to his deeds.’” The opponent would be objecting to the claim that people must have faith and works for salvation. James’ opponents understood that we have different gifts, some have faith, and others have

⁴⁰ Robert H. Stein, 10.

⁴¹ Douglas, J. Moo, 104.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁴ William Barclay, 76-7.

works. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 plainly says God gives spiritual gifts that include faith.

The faith to which Paul is referring is a special “miracle working faith.”⁴⁵

An argument against the first two interpretations will not be discussed due to the scope of the present work,⁴⁶ but the third will be the preferred.⁴⁷ This interpretation argues the separation between faith and works. The man possessing faith cannot condemn the one that possesses only works and vice versa.⁴⁸ James’ reply in verse 18b argues against a false dichotomy of faith and works. He challenges his objector to produce real faith that has no expression in works, while James has no difficulty demonstrating his faith. Faith that is void of works is really no faith at all; and true faith is united with works, which are the evidence of true saving faith.

James discredits the dichotomy by addressing this faith as empty. He writes, “You believe that there is one God” (2:19), which describes this faith as an intellectual grasp of the *Shema* by his use of “believe that”⁴⁹ rather than the use of “believe in.”⁵⁰ This *Shema* was extended into Christianity to distinguish it from polytheistic or syncretistic influence.⁵¹ James mocks his opponent’s faith by saying, “good” because he grasps truth that was distinguished from the pagan world.⁵² This faith is a belief *about* God, an agreement of a theological statement,⁵³ rather than a living-trust *in* God. James never denies the intellectual dimension of faith, but alone is not enough. Confirmation of

⁴⁵ Joel C. Gregory, *James: Faith That Works!* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1986), 55; John Calvin, 402; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* Vol. 6 Acts to Revelations (Hendrickson, 1991), 458.

⁴⁶ For an argument against the first two interpretations, see Moo’s Commentary *James* pages 104-6.

⁴⁷ Stein, Moo, Barclay, Dowd, Lorenzen, Reicke, Davids, Dibelius, and Tasker accept the third interpretation.

⁴⁸ Robert H. Stein, 11.

⁴⁹ πιστευεις οτι is translated “believe that”

⁵⁰ πιστευεις plus the dative εν or εις means “believe in.” Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 125.

⁵¹ Thornwald Lorenzen, 232.

⁵² Sharyn Dowd, “Faith That Works: James 2:14-26,” *Review and Expositor* 97 (2000): 198.

⁵³ Robert H. Stein, 11.

theological propositions is essential, but orthodoxy needs to be supplemented with orthopraxy for it to be practical.⁵⁴

Demons possess counterfeit faith and shudder⁵⁵ because they know the truth. Ironically, James' opponents have faith less than that of demons. The demons reaction to their belief⁵⁶ is a more appropriate than James' opponents.⁵⁷ An orthodox *Shema* void of works is less than the faith of demons. Faith must affect our attitudes and actions.⁵⁸

2:20-26

James boldly calls his opponent a “foolish man”⁵⁹ literally “you insane fellow.”⁶⁰ The term “foolish” is translated from a word⁶¹ that has overtones of intellectual and moral error.⁶² James asks his opponent, “...do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?” The word “useless”⁶³ literally means “not working” or “workless.” James is essentially asking, “Do you want evidence that faith without works is workless?” James illustrates his thesis by the examples of Abraham and Rahab.

James emphasizes why Abraham was considered righteous. James flatly says because of his works, “he offered up his son Isaac on the altar.” Stein points out that the question as to whether Abraham was justified by works expects a positive answer.⁶⁴

James explains that Abraham was righteous on the basis of his works in verse 22. He

⁵⁴ Mark Proctor, 318-9

⁵⁵ “shudder” is translated from φρισσουσιν which means “shudder,” “shiver,” or “tremble” from fear.

⁵⁶ Demons possess greater knowledge than men due to their supernatural nature.

⁵⁷ Douglas J. Moo, 107.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ ἀνθρώπε κενε

⁶⁰ Max Zerwick S. J., and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* unab. 4th revised edition (Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico: Roma, 1993), 695.

⁶¹ κενος can be translated “senseless,” “foolish,” or “empty.”

⁶² Peter Davids, 126.

⁶³ James' word choice in Greek creates a ‘play on words.’ The word for “work” is ἐργον and “useless” comes from ἀργη, which has the negative prefix ‘α’ in front of ἐργον.

⁶⁴ Verse 21 says, Ἀβραάμ ὁ πατήρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἐργῶν ἐδικαιώθη ἀνενεγκάζ Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ θυσιαστηρίου; The οὐκ in Greek expects the positive answer.

writes, “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” James’ use of the plural form of “works”⁶⁵ points to the fact that offering Isaac on the altar was one of many works that made him righteous.⁶⁶ James links faith and works by saying that they were working together. He points out that works “work with” faith and that his faith was made complete by what he did. Abraham’s faith was made mature or perfect by his works.

The example begun in verse 21 concludes in verse 23. It states that the “scripture was fulfilled,” demonstrating that Abraham supplemented “his belief in God’s promises with complementary deeds of kindness that perfected his walk with Yahweh and gave his statement in Genesis 15:6 its ultimate significance.”⁶⁷ Genesis 15:6 states, “Abram believed the Lord, and he [God] credited it to him as righteousness.” God found Abraham loyal, which resulted in His crediting of righteousness to him. Abraham’s loyalty was a reflection of his faith in God. Abraham’s faith moved him to obedience, which resulted in “righteousness” and why he was called a friend of God.⁶⁸

Verse 24 is controversial because of the statement “not by faith alone.” This apparent contradiction to Paul will be discussed later. While James states his thesis, he clearly addresses his specific audience. He uses different words when he addresses his opponent from his readers.⁶⁹ While the necessity of works is reaffirmed, he is not teaching justification by works. James is stressing that justification is not by faith *alone*

⁶⁵ τοις εργασις

⁶⁶ Robert H. Stein, 14.

⁶⁷ Mark Proctor, 324-5.

⁶⁸ φίλος θεου εκληθη

⁶⁹ He uses ορατε (sec. person pl.) in this verse rather than βλέπετε (sec. person sing.) in verse 22 when he addressed his opponent.

but that salvation is by faith working together with works.⁷⁰ James concludes that faith along with works justify a man. Faith for his opponent was dead even though it was orthodox; it produced no love for his neighbor, only speech. Faith for James was an orthodox understanding producing good works.

James mentions only Rahab's works and makes no mention of her faith even though he could have.⁷¹ Beginning this verse, "In the same way..." we can interpret Rahab's example as Abraham's. The context of this entire passage is between faith and works. It would be proper to interpret Rahab's work as stemming from her faith.⁷² Moo comments that James wanted to emphasize that Rahab was a prostitute. While Abraham was seen as a great hero of the faith, their father,⁷³ Rahab was a woman of pagan living. Abraham and Rahab were righteous on the basis of their works that resulted from their faith.⁷⁴ They were justified by their works and not by faith alone. Given the context, it would be appropriate to at least mention the faith of Rahab, but James does not. Faith might not be mentioned because his opponent might try to use that against James. Also, James does not provide "proof" that Rahab was righteous as he did with Abraham.⁷⁵ James did not mention Rahab's faith or "proof" of her acceptance before God because they already knew this, due to Jewish tradition.⁷⁶

Verse 26 not only concludes the third section, it concludes the passage. James compares the relationship between body and spirit with faith and works. "The body

⁷⁰ Jas 2:22.

⁷¹ James could have mentioned Rahab's faith...see Joshua 2:9-11 or Hebrews 11:31.

⁷² Robert H. Stein, 15.

⁷³ Jas 2:21.

⁷⁴ Douglas J. Moo, 116-7.

⁷⁵ Abraham was called a friend of God in verse 23.

⁷⁶ Martin Dibelius, 166-7.

without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” In the same way the body is dead with the absence of the spirit, so faith is dead without works. James is comparing body with faith and spirit with works. The meaning is “that an unproductive and apathetic religion is as dead as a body that has no spirit.”⁷⁷ “Dead orthodoxy has absolutely no power to save and may in fact hinder the person from coming to living faith, a faith enlivened by works of charity.”⁷⁸ “Dead” faith produces no works, but “living” faith cannot be separated from works. Faith and works are not independent in the same way that a body cannot exist apart from the spirit.

Terms Defined: Faith and Works

Faith

The word faith is found in this passage eleven times and the form “believe” is found three times. Faith, in this passage, has two meanings: the first is James’ opponent’s definition and second is James.’⁷⁹ James hints that his opponents’ faith is not real in verse 14, “Can such faith save him?” The definite article used in the Greek along with faith⁸⁰ indicates that James has a particular kind of faith in mind. In verse 18, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds,’” which describes the faith of James’ opponent. It is used in this passage as an “intellectual acceptance of a theological assertion” as described in the *Shema*, that the demons also believe.⁸¹ This definition is how his audience would have understood it. Rakestraw, defining faith writes, “his speaking of ‘faith by itself’ (v. 17) and ‘faith alone’ (v. 24) reveal that his concept is one

⁷⁷ Mark Proctor, 329.

⁷⁸ Peter Davids, 134.

⁷⁹ Robert H. Stein, 5.

⁸⁰ ἡ πίστις translated “this faith” in verse 14, 17, and 20.

⁸¹ Jas 2:19.

of mental agreement.”⁸² Davids says the same thing when he wrote, “the fact that James writes *you believe that* rather than ‘you believe in’ shows that he is thinking of intellectual belief rather than personal commitment.”⁸³ James’ audience had faith that was unproductive and unacceptable. He is condemning this faith even though it had an orthodox understanding of God, but since it is void of love, it is worthless.

James’ definition of real faith is deeper than his opponents. Moo commenting says, “It is absolutely vital to understand that the main point of this argument, expressed three times (in vv. 17, 20, and 26), is not that works must be added to faith, but that genuine faith *includes* works. That is its very nature.”⁸⁴ James emphasizes the union between faith and works. Rakestraw quoting Ropes says, “James’ real contention in vv. 20-22 is not so much of the necessity of works as of the inseparability of vital faith and works.”⁸⁵ For James, the mental facet of faith, which is necessary, is only *part* of the faith that justifies. James is going beyond this and exhorts a ‘completed,’ ‘perfected’ or ‘matured’ faith, which leads to salvation. Faith is a mental understanding of a doctrinal position, “combined with works, which he understands as ethical behavior, specifically works of mercy.”⁸⁶ James points to the dual aspect of faith when he wrote, “You see that a person is justified by what he *does* and not by *faith alone*” (2:24).⁸⁷ This dual aspect of faith is the amalgamation of orthodox belief with works.

⁸² Robert V. Rakestraw, “James 2:14-26: Does James Contradict The Pauline Soteriology?,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (1986): 36.

⁸³ Peter Davids, *James* (GNC: San Francisco: Harper & Roe, 1983), 49.

⁸⁴ Douglas J. Moo, 99.

⁸⁵ Robert V. Rakestraw, 37.

⁸⁶ Sharyn Dowd, 202.

⁸⁷ Emphasis mine.

Works

James is teaching that a person is justified by what he does. How does James define deeds? What are these deeds or works he mentions? The word “works” is used twelve times in this passage and always positively. Works are used to describe “loving mercy, kindness, and obedience to God.”⁸⁸ Traditionally these works are thought of as “acts of charity that fulfill the law of love” as demonstrated by verses 15-16, but Moo argues against this traditional interpretation. Moo broadens the scope of this interpretation to mean, “obedience to God” that includes these “acts of charity,” but not limited to them.⁸⁹ Moo writes:

...it is not clear that we can confine James’ ‘works’ to acts of charity. To be sure, he has just been speaking about activities that fulfill the law of love and cites as an illustration acts of charity in verse 15-16. But his specific examples, drawn from the lives of Abraham and Rahab (vv. 21-25), do not clearly involve acts of charity. Particularly in Abraham’s case, the focus is on his obedience to God *per se*, with no inkling of any charity shown to others.⁹⁰

Works mean, “anything done in obedience to God,” not just particular acts of charity. These works or anything done in obedience to God are a necessary facet of saving faith. These works are “post-conversion” works. James is teaching the inseparability of works and faith. It can be concluded that where there is no saving faith, there are no good works and that where there are no good works, there is no saving faith. Good works are not meritorious to salvation nor do they reserve the right for salvation.

While these works are post-conversion, James is not implying that these works are perfect works that uphold the requirements of the divine Law. These works are different in moral quality from the works of the unregenerate in that they are united with

⁸⁸ Robert H. Stein, 7.

⁸⁹ Douglas J. Moo, 101-2.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

faith. Unregenerate men do not have faith; the good works they perform are as “dead” as the faith of James’ opponent who could not demonstrate his faith through works. True good works do not only outwardly conform to the Law of God, but they are done consciously for the sake of pleasing the Lord. These works spring from a desire to do the will of God flowing from a heart of love for God.⁹¹

Content of James 2:24

Of all the statements in *James*, there is none more controversial. At least on the surface, this verse comes the closest to contradicting Paul. Therefore, Davids calls this verse the *crux interpretum* not only for this book, “but New Testament theology in general.”⁹²

James writes, “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” Justification is by a faith that works—obedience to God—and not by faith alone. Applying the definitions above, the verse could be restated, “You see that a person is justified by a faith that demonstrates itself through obedience to God and not by a faith that is only an intellectual grasp of orthodoxy alone.” James is concluding his thesis by displaying the nature of true Biblical faith—a faith that works. He does not mention faith in the first part of the verse⁹³ because he assumes it. The nature of true faith is the essence of this section as well as the entire Epistle, though James makes no mention of it here nor did he in Rahab’s example. He is focusing on the works aspect of faith.

⁹¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 540-1.

⁹² Peter Davids, 130.

⁹³ “You see that a person is justified by what he does...”

What James meant by “faith alone” was an intellectual understanding of orthodoxy that is dead.⁹⁴ James pointedly says, “not by *faith alone*” emphasizing that works accompany genuine faith. This union between faith and works is necessary for faith to have value. James concludes that a man is “justified by *what he does*” because this is the practical outcome of faith—obedience to God. The justification to which James was referring is a demonstration of one’s profession. True saving faith will result in a changed life that produces acts of obedience.⁹⁵ James never concludes that salvation is by works. He is teaching that saving faith is practical and is more than embracing theological propositions.

Relationship between Faith and Works

The relationship between faith and works is illustrated by the examples of Abraham and Rahab. James writes, “You see that his faith and his action were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” James connects Abraham’s faith with his works and concludes that together they made him righteous. The Greek word *συνηργει* means, “work with.” It has the prefix *συν* meaning “with” in front of *εργον*, which means, “work.” Verseput comments, “As Dibelius and others correctly recognize, the verb *συνηργει* in verse 22a cannot be understood to mean that faith assists in the production of works for the common goal toward which both aim is not the stimulation of Abraham’s deeds but his justification before God.”⁹⁶ James is illustrating that his works “work with” his faith, and that his faith was “complete”⁹⁷ by his works.

⁹⁴ See verses 2:17, 20, 26.

⁹⁵ C. Ryan Jenkins, 68.

⁹⁶ Donald J. Verseput, “Reworking The Puzzle of Faith and Deeds in James 2:14-26,” *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 112-3.

⁹⁷ The word “complete” in the NIV is translated from the Greek *ετελειωθη* meaning “mature” or “perfect.”

James does not mean that Abraham had a “weak” or “loveless” faith so that by works it became strong. Men either believe or not, as there is no degree of justifying faith.⁹⁸

James does not fight the concept that Abraham’s relationship with God began by his trusting in God’s promises. He simply is highlighting that his works were demonstrating his faith. If Abraham did not have this outward demonstration of works, then he would have fallen short of God’s requirements for a “pure and faultless” religion.⁹⁹

Faith is primary and works alone do not save. “Works do not produce faith. James never entertains the idea that works can exist independently without faith.”¹⁰⁰ Matthew Henry comments, “The best works, without faith, are dead...it is by faith that anything we do is really good, as done with an eye to God, in obedience to Him.” He continues,

The most plausible profession of faith, without works, is dead: as a root is dead that produces nothing green, nothing of fruit. Faith is the root, good works are the fruits, and we must see to it to have both. We must not think that either, without the other, will justify and save us. This is the grace of God wherein we stand, and we should stand in it.¹⁰¹

Faith is the issue under discussion and not works. Faith that saves has works, not works independent of faith. Faith and works should not be viewed as separate; for James, they are a necessary unity. James does not have in mind the concept of faith plus works, but rather faith that works¹⁰² is what made Abraham righteous. Abraham’s faith affected what he did and what he did affected his faith. His faith demonstrated itself through

⁹⁸ R. G. V. Tasker, 69.

⁹⁹ Mark Proctor, 325.

¹⁰⁰ Robert H. Stein, 14.

¹⁰¹ Matthew Henry, 792.

¹⁰² James B. Adamson, 130.

obedience to God while his obedience perfected his faith. James does not mean that there is a faith which cannot exist independent from works, for a dying person or a paralytic may have faith and not be able to perform a good work.¹⁰³

In *James*, the faith that was “dead” and “useless” was restricted to an intellectual understanding of theological truth without the outward manifestation of that truth. This faith is not faith at all, for it will not save because it has no practical usefulness. Faith requires both an intellectual understanding of the Gospel and an internalizing of this truth that results in trust (obedience) in Christ. James was contrasting a “confession of faith” to a “dynamic possession of faith.”¹⁰⁴ A confession of faith alone, free from works of love, is intellectual and nothing more, but the dynamic possession of faith is a living faith that produced obedience to God that demonstrated a confession of faith.¹⁰⁵ James understood that justification was by faith that expressed itself through love—obedience to the Law. The Law is the standard of the moral life of holiness that reflects the character of God and therefore it is a permanent guide for men to follow.

¹⁰³ Douglas J. Moo, 112.

¹⁰⁴ C. Ryan Jenkins, 65.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

Chapter 3: Paul

*“My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.”*

-Edward Mote-

General Background

Historical/Cultural

It is not known for certain to whom *Ephesians* was originally intended.¹ The words, “in Ephesus” of the address, are absent in the earliest and most authoritative texts.² Due to this omission, the most accepted view is that the Epistle was a circular intended for all the churches in Asia,³ of which only some were known by Paul.⁴ The address “in Ephesus” is likely since Ephesus was the prominent church in Asia where it would have been read first, but also because it was the capital city of the Roman providence of Asia.⁵ This theory seems most likely due to the Epistle’s character. It is not as warm and personal, nor does it address specific problems or situations as Paul’s other Epistles, even though he was there for three years⁶ where ties of affection developed between the church and Paul.⁷

¹ D. A. Carson, Moo, and Morris, 311.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 13.

³ Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae, and other cities

⁴ Charles R. Erdman, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1931), 13.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ D. A. Carson, Moo, and Morris, 311.

⁷ Charles R. Erdman, 12.

General Context of Ephesians 2:1-10

Paul contrasts the relationship between our former selves united to Adam,⁸ with those re-created in Christ Jesus united to Christ by faith.⁹ In Adam, man is a slave to the world, the devil, and the flesh and he does works of unrighteousness; in Christ as a new creation free from slavery, he is designed for the purpose of doing works of righteousness.

Ephesians 2:8-10 forms the third and final section of 2:1-10. Verses 1-3 depict man prior to salvation as dead in “trespasses and sins.” Verses 4-7 describe the believer’s union with Christ and its effect of converting grace. Verses 8-10 summarize Paul’s Gospel—the nature and purpose of salvation. “This last section is linked to the middle section by the repetition with some additions of v. 5b—‘by grace you have been saved’—at the beginning of v. 8 to provide a transition to the summarizing conclusion about the relationship of grace and works. This means that vv. 8-10 cannot be interpreted without reference to v. 5b and its context in the middle section.”¹⁰

2:1-3

The basic thought of the first section is that man is spiritually dead as a result of “transgressions and sins.” When Paul wrote, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,” he is referring to the broken relationship between God and man, which resulted from sin in thought, word, and deed. This verse parallels the outworking of what God told Adam in the garden—if you (Adam) eat of the tree of the knowledge of

⁸ Eph 2:1-3.

⁹ Eph 2:4-10.

¹⁰ Andrew T. Lincoln, “Ephesians 2:8-10: A Summary of Paul’s Gospel?,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 619.

good and evil, you will surely die.¹¹ When Adam sinned, his relationship with God was broken—he was spiritually dead. Adam’s sin affected all his progeny; his sin was imputed to all men.¹² Man is not “lightly flawed” or just “sick;” he is in fact dead.¹³ Man is born naturally dead which demonstrates the imputation of Adam’s sin.

When Paul uses the term “dead,” he is referring to spiritual death, not physical death. Boice, thinking in this vein, describes people as “walking corpses” because they are spiritually dead and physically alive.¹⁴ Fallen man is like a spiritual corpse unable to respond correctly to God because he cannot “understand and appreciate spiritual things.”¹⁵ Like Lazarus, who was dead in his tomb and unable to get up and walk under his own power,¹⁶ so is a sinner, prior to God “making us alive with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5) unable to move toward God. The whole life prior to being made alive is lived completely in the sphere of spiritual death.¹⁷ Lloyd-Jones describing the unregenerate writes, “...*life for the non-Christian is a living death.*”¹⁸

The unregenerate man is dead toward God and destitute of the powers of spiritual life,¹⁹ but is alive toward wickedness. Paul describes this by the words “followed” and “gratifying” in verses 2 and 3, respectively. He writes “when you *followed* the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air,” and “All of us also lived among them at one time, *gratifying* the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and

¹¹ Gen 2:17.

¹² *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 6.

¹³ James M. Boice, *Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich. A New Testament Study—Ephesians* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1979), 40.

¹⁶ John 11.

¹⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 407.

¹⁸ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Way of Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1972), 18.

¹⁹ Matthew Henry, 557.

thoughts.” Man will “follow” and “gratify” the sinful nature²⁰ because he is dead toward God resulting in a life according to the flesh. Since man is spiritually dead, he is a slave.

Paul tells us that man is enslaved to the world and the devil. Verse 2 explains how man formerly lived²¹ in his transgressions and sins; all of what man does is characterized by sin. Man is born depraved and enslaved to sin and cannot free himself from bondage. Being in a state of sin, man conforms to the world,²² which is a manifestation of his enslavement. When Paul wrote, “when you followed the ways of the world” he was referring to the depraved state of all mankind. Erdman describes this as “a life shaped by the godless standards and aims which result in moral ruin.”²³ Without Christ, man is captivated by the social and value system of the world, which stands opposed to Christ. Degenerate man necessarily follows the “pattern of life characterized by the world” in his pursuits apart from God.²⁴

Man is also a slave to the devil. Paul tells us that we “followed...the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” The devil has authority over the “kingdom of the air” and is ruler of those spiritual beings in the heavenly realm.²⁵ Satan has authority over those who live according to “ways of this world,” and when Paul adds, “the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient,” he does not mean that the devil is at work in those who are disobedient. The term “spirit” is used similarly to when we say “the spirit of the age.”²⁶ The devil is the prince or ruler of that spirit. The term “disobedience” refers to the “obstinate opposition to the divine will.” And the “sons of disobedience” are those who

²⁰ Sinful nature is translated from σαρχ literally “flesh.”

²¹ Eph 2:2 says, “you used to live” is translated from περιπατησατε, literally “you walked.”

²² Matthew Henry, 557.

²³ Charles R. Erdman, 44.

²⁴ Arthur G. Patzia, *Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians* (San Francisco: Harper & Roe, 1984), 153-4.

²⁵ Eph 6:12.

²⁶ Homer A. Kent, Jr. *Ephesians The Glory of the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 34.

are characterized by disobedience to God.²⁷ The devil exerts his power over the evil forces in “the air” and over the spirit that works in the wicked hearts of the disobedient.²⁸ “The air” represents the seat of the devil’s kingdom, as was the opinion of Jews and heathens that the air was full of spirits, and it was there that they used their powers.²⁹ God allows Satan to have some power over creation, but ultimate power is God’s alone. Unregenerate men walk according to the devil and conform to his will and pleasure; this is why he is the god of this world.³⁰

Unregenerate men are not only slaves to the world and the devil, but also to the flesh. The term “flesh”³¹ does not mean the human body. There is nothing wrong with a body of flesh. The term “flesh” refers to the sinful nature that all men are naturally born with.³² Paul writes, “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts” (Ephesians 2:3). Man naturally seeks to satisfy the sinful longings. Everyone desires food, drink, rest, etc., which God made good. Paul says that the desire for these things takes control and drives us. There is nothing wrong with being hungry, but when a man lives to eat, it is wrong. If the desire for food controls you, then you are suffering from the desires of the flesh.³³ God gave us these desires, but they are supposed to be held in check, yet they have control. The flesh also controls the mind—“whole process of the thinking”—anything that governs our attention and activity is a desire of the mind.³⁴

²⁷ Charles R. Erdman, 44.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Matthew Henry, 577.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The term “flesh” is translated from σαρκ.

³² Warren W. Wiersbe, 42.

³³ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, 42.

³⁴ Ibid., 43.

This kind of lust reveals itself in jealousy, envy, malice, pride, hatred, wrath, and bitterness³⁵ and on a different level, ambition, lust for wealth, power, success, position, and social status. When we are driven and living for these things we are enslaved by them.³⁶ The flesh reveals itself in respectable as well as scandalous ways. Sin affects everything man does and thinks. Man's will is not able to obey God or do spiritual good because it is contrary to man's nature. The carnal mind is enslaved—"following its desires and thoughts."

As a result of man being depraved, he is by nature an "object of wrath."³⁷ The objects or children of wrath choose to disobey God and serve the devil. Disobedience and enmity against God must result in God's judgment. "The wrath of God is a holy displeasure against sin."³⁸

2:4-7

The Greek text begins verse 4 with "But God"³⁹ which emphasizes the only solution to the condition of man described above. God initiated the redemption⁴⁰ of man. There was nothing in man that "provided the cause or impulse for redemption. It was based entirely on God's mercy."⁴¹ God the Father "made us alive with Christ"⁴² when we were dead in our transgressions. While man was "walking" in the desires of the flesh, there was nothing in him to make him worthy or attractive to God. Boice commenting on man's fallen condition says,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 44.

³⁷ "object of wrath" is translated from τέκνα φυσει οργής which is literally "children of wrath."

³⁸ Charles R. Erdman, 45.

³⁹ ο δε θεος

⁴⁰ The word redemption means to buy out of slavery.

⁴¹ Homer A. Kent Jr., 36.

⁴² The Greek word συνεζωοποιτησεν literally means "he [God] made us alive together with."

...we are ‘dead in [our] transgressions and sins.’ This means that we are no more able to help ourselves spiritually than a corpse is able to improve its condition. Even when the Gospel is preached, we are no more able to respond to it than a corpse can respond to a command to get up—unless God speaks the command. Dead means hopeless.⁴³

Man could not be in a worse condition, but God’s great love⁴⁴ “made us alive” apart from our works and desires. God, out of His great love, loved us and poured out His mercy by sending Jesus to suffer and die both spiritual and physical death for those whom God predestined⁴⁵ to be saved. This love cannot be comprehended,⁴⁶ but those who receive it are compelled by it. The Greek is literally stated “through his great love, he loved you,”⁴⁷ and is stronger than the NIV text. When such a love is directed toward sinners, it is called mercy.⁴⁸ The manner in which salvation came was “by grace”⁴⁹ and “not of yourselves.”⁵⁰ Henry writes, “Our faith, our conversion, and our eternal salvation, are not the mere product of any natural ability, nor of any merit of our own.”⁵¹ Salvation not only delivers sinners from wrath but also brings them into the blessings of the Gospel. When Paul adds, “made us alive with Christ,” he is depicting that life is with Christ and no where else. This new life, free from slavery to the world, the devil, and the flesh is still imperfect. Those redeemed by Christ at the cross are being sanctified.⁵²

God also “raised us up with Christ”⁵³ and “seated us with Christ”⁵⁴ in the heavenly realms. When Christ was resurrected from the dead, all believers who were

⁴³ James M. Boice, 53.

⁴⁴ πολλήν ἀγάπην in Eph 2:4.

⁴⁵ Eph 1:4,5,11.

⁴⁶ Eph 3:19.

⁴⁷ διὰ τὴν πολλήν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ [ὣν ἠγάπησεν] ἡμᾶς

⁴⁸ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 117.

⁴⁹ χάριτι

⁵⁰ οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν literally “not by you”

⁵¹ Matthew Henry, 557.

⁵² Sanctification is the on going process of being formed into the image of Jesus.

⁵³ συνηγειρεν literally means “raised up together with.”

⁵⁴ συνεκάθισεν literally means “seated together with.”

united with Christ were also raised from the dead.⁵⁵ Union with Christ has been called “the heart of Paul’s religion.” “Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.”⁵⁶ In union with Christ, Christ’s resurrection and exultation guarantees the believer a bodily resurrection from the dead with all its glory and is the basis for all present blessings.⁵⁷ Being united with Christ, the sinner can say, we are “tried, condemned, crucified, buried, but also made alive, raised and set in the heavenly places.”⁵⁸ Our position is not among the dead in “trespasses and sins” nor do we belong to the ruler of the “air” dominated by evil powers, we are in fellowship with God and live a new life in His presence.⁵⁹ Lloyd-Jones describes this new life:

The difference between the sinner and the Christian, the unbeliever and the believer, is not that the believer, the Christian, has certain faculties which the other man lacks. No, what happens is that this new disposition given to the Christian directs his faculties in an entirely different way. He is not given a new brain; he is not given a new intelligence, or anything else. He has always had these; they are his servants, his instruments, his ‘members,’ as Paul calls them in the sixth chapter of Romans; what is new is a new bent, a new disposition. He has turned in a different direction; there is a new power working in him and guiding his faculties. This is the thing that makes a man a Christian.⁶⁰

The purpose for uniting sinners with Christ is to “show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). The word, “show”⁶¹ denotes a continual and ongoing revealing of God’s grace demonstrated through Christ to all future generations. God’s purpose in salvation extends beyond man to God’s Glory, which is demonstrated to the whole creation.⁶² This grace toward sinners is infinite and cannot be fully revealed to finite creatures such as man and angels, but will

⁵⁵ This raising from the dead is in the spiritual sense not physical. The physical resurrection will occur at the παρουσία.

⁵⁶ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 170.

⁵⁷ William Hendriksen, 118.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Charles R. Erdman, 46.

⁶⁰ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, 79.

⁶¹ ενδειξεται aorist subjunctive middle form meaning “show” or “prove” pertaining to the future.

⁶² R. C. H. Lenski, 420.

be marveled at for all eternity.⁶³ God's grace to man came through the kindness that He showed through the finished work of Christ.

Paul has described redemption by the phrases, "because of his great love for us," "rich in mercy," "it is by grace you have been saved," "he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." Verses 1-7 has contrasted the Christian's past to the Christian present. Paul contrasts bondage and freedom, children of wrath to children of God, from living under the reign of sin to living in union with Christ where he is our Lord and ruler. The "But God"⁶⁴ of verse 4, the words, *sunedoopoiesen* (συνεζωοποίησεν),⁶⁵ *sunegeipen* (συνηγειρεν),⁶⁶ and *sunekathisen* (συνεκαθίσεν),⁶⁷ and the perfect form of *sesosmenoi* (σεσωσμενοι),⁶⁸ in verses 5 and 6, mark the clear break between the Christians' past and present. Verses 8-10 add to the contrast of 1-7 by adding that "walking"⁶⁹ in good works is contrasted with "walked"⁷⁰ in trespasses and sins.⁷¹

Terms Defined: Faith and Works

When defining "faith" *pistis* (πίστις) and "works" *ergon* (εργον), Paul's context must be considered. What does Paul mean by the phrase "through faith?"⁷² What is

⁶³ Homer A. Kent Jr., 38.

⁶⁴ ο δε θεος

⁶⁵ made us alive together with Christ

⁶⁶ raised us up together with Christ

⁶⁷ seated us together with Christ

⁶⁸ been saved (perfect participle passive is understood as a past action with a present effect)

⁶⁹ περιπατησωμεν aorist subjunctive meaning "walking" with respect to the future.

⁷⁰ περιεπατησατε aorist meaning "you (pl.) walked"

⁷¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, 619-620.

⁷² Literally δια πιστεως

“faith?” Salvation is by faith and “not by works,”⁷³ but why does Paul write that we were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works?”⁷⁴ What is the proper place of “works?”

Faith

The object of faith is Jesus Christ Himself as verses 4-7 points out. God, rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ and unites the sinner to Jesus. Faith is the mode by which salvation comes, not the cause. Lloyd-Jones commenting on these verses writes, “Faith is the channel, it is the instrument through which this salvation which is of the grace of God comes to me.” He further says that faith does not save nor does belief; only Christ saves.⁷⁵

Faith is a reliance on God for salvation apart from works. Lorenzen defining “faith” writes that faith is “man’s total response to and involvement with Jesus Christ. It means the acceptance of God giving Himself to us in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁶ Faith alone justifies the ungodly. The works of the law have no saving benefit. Paul was explaining the doctrine of justification by grace through faith against an understanding that one’s relationship with God can be achieved and maintained through the works of law.⁷⁷ Faith was more than just intellectual knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is the vehicle by which sinners are saved. Faith is a whole-hearted trust in God that the grace required for salvation is given as a gift apart from any efforts of works.⁷⁸

⁷³ Literally ουκ εξ εργαων

⁷⁴ Literally κτισθεντες εν Χριστω Ιησου επι εργοις αγαθοις

⁷⁵ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, 136.

⁷⁶ Thornwald Lorenzen, 233-4.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Robert H. Stein, 6.

The gift of faith is given to those whom God re-creates. They are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Faith results in a new life in Jesus characterized by good works prepared in advance for our doing.

Works

Paul uses the term “works” in two different ways: first, negatively, “not by works;” then positively, “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

Paul teaches that “works” contribute nothing toward salvation. He writes, “not by works, so no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:9). “Works” are antithetical to grace, “For by grace you have been saved...not by works.” God’s grace for salvation is a gift, and if it is a gift, then it is not by works. Paul militates against a justification that could be earned by performing “works of law.” Paul opposes performing ritual acts of the Old Testament for the purpose of a right standing before the judgment of God.⁷⁹ “Works” in Paul is commonly interpreted to be “works of law,” meaning ceremonial old covenant regulations or works done with a legalistic spirit.⁸⁰ Moo, rejecting this interpretation, concludes that the term “works” refers to “anything that is done.” Paul’s purpose is to eliminate all works, not just certain “works of law” or works done for the basis of justification.⁸¹

Paul opposed “works” because it denied the adequacy of God’s gift of grace through faith, and because it puts man in the place of savior. Man’s salvation is for the glory of God, but works are for the glory of man.⁸²

⁷⁹ Robert H. Stein, 7.

⁸⁰ Douglas J. Moo, 101.

⁸¹ Ibid., 101-2.

⁸² Andrew T. Lincoln, 623.

Positively, “works” are a necessary result of the gift of salvation through faith. These good works are good because God prepared them in advance for us to do.⁸³ These good works are not perfect works. While moral and spiritual perfection is our goal, perfection will not exist until we enter the next life.⁸⁴ Paul wrote, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Good works are the result of being made alive in Christ. They flow out of a relationship with God and are a reflection of the character and action of God.⁸⁵ Having been “created in Christ Jesus,” believers are a new creation by God’s grace, living as Jesus did, reflecting the love of God in the world.

Content of Ephesians 2:8-10

These verses have been called “the most effective summary we have of the Pauline doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.”⁸⁶ This summary unfolds the theological⁸⁷ and practical⁸⁸ elements of salvation.

In verses 8 and 9, Paul asserts that salvation is solely the work of God and man receives this salvation through faith. Salvation and all it encompasses is a gift in spite of our former life of sin. Paul emphasizes that salvation is by “grace”⁸⁹ and is independent of anything man has done or can do.⁹⁰ While we were dead in sins, having no ability to come to God on our own, that “God made us alive;” “By grace you have been saved...and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Can a dead man raise himself

⁸³ Literally God prepared the good works for us to “walk” in them.

⁸⁴ William Hendriksen, 125.

⁸⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. New International Commentary of the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 291.

⁸⁶ C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 268-9.

⁸⁷ Eph 2:8-9.

⁸⁸ Eph 2:10.

⁸⁹ χάρις (grace) found in v. 5 and 8 means “unmerited” or “undeserved favor.”

⁹⁰ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, 130.

to life? No! Neither can man dead in sin raise himself spiritually. Lenski commenting writes, “Faith is not something that we on our part produce and furnish toward our salvation but is produced in our hearts by God to accomplish his purpose in us.”⁹¹ Faith has no merit in itself, nor do works.

If faith were a work, then there could be boasting, but there is not; faith is not the cause of salvation. All “works” done prior to being united with Christ did not please God for they were performed under the dominion of the world, the devil, and the flesh. Prior to grace, man followed the ways of darkness in his mind and heart. Any work prior to salvation was not “good” because it did not come from a devotion to God. Everything the unregenerate man does flows from the flesh. There was nothing to boast about before God, either prior to Him making us alive with Christ or after. The entire life of a Christian is characterized by grace. Man has done nothing to promote his salvation nor do “good works” merit favor from God. The situation for all men was desperate; it took God’s infinite grace to save us. Grace would be excluded if salvation came from ourselves. In the same way, faith would be excluded if salvation were by works. Works and faith are complete opposites.⁹²

There is controversy surrounding the word “this” in verse 8. What does the word modify? If faith is self-generated, then boasting is possible, but it is not. The confusion surrounding the word “this”⁹³ divides into two schools. On the one side, “this” refers to faith. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this (faith) not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” But on the other side, “this” refers to grace for salvation. “For by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this (the position of

⁹¹ R. C. H. Lenski, 422.

⁹² Ibid., 424.

⁹³ “this” in Greek is *τοῦτο*

grace) not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”⁹⁴ Lloyd-Jones claims that one cannot settle the dispute because it is not one of grammar, but of language.

In the first case, the word “this” referring to faith is neuter in Greek,⁹⁵ while the word “faith” is feminine.⁹⁶ Many interpret this difference to mean that Paul did not intend for the word “this” to modify “faith.” In light of this, Robert Countess wrote an article called, “*Thank God for the Genitive!*” in which he demonstrates that Greek does in fact leave “room” for words to modify other words of differing genders. He writes, “in languages which do have gender, gender is never completely linked with physical sex.” He gives a few examples and writes,

In view of this, one should not be surprised to find that where grammatical gender and physical sex conflict, *the gender of a pronoun may sometimes agree with the physical sex of its antecedent rather than the grammatical gender.*

Returning to the case in point, one may observe that since both *πίστις* and *τοῦτο* are sexless, Paul would violate no propriety of physical gender at all by referring back to faith with *τοῦτο* instead of *αὐτή*.⁹⁷

He demonstrated this by citing other works including Abraham Kuypers.⁹⁸ He concluded, “It appears to be that salvation with all its component parts is of God; even the faith with which a man subjectively appropriates the Gospel is bestowed by God.”⁹⁹

On the other side, the word “this” referring to the whole act of salvation is supported by Bruce,¹⁰⁰ Lenski,¹⁰¹ Hendriksen,¹⁰² Kent,¹⁰³ Wiersbe,¹⁰⁴ and Calvin, who writes,

⁹⁴ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, 135.

⁹⁵ “this” *τοῦτο*

⁹⁶ “faith” *πίστεως*

⁹⁷ Robert H. Countess, “Thank God For The Genitive!,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (1969): 119.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Robert H. Countess, 121.

¹⁰⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle To The Ephesians*, 51.

¹⁰¹ R. C. H. Lenski, 423.

¹⁰² William Hendriksen, 121.

¹⁰³ Homer A. Kent, Jr., 39.

And here we must advert to a very common error in the interpretation of this passage. Many restrict the word *gift* to faith alone. But Paul is only repeating in other words the former sentiment. His meaning is, not that faith is the gift of God, but that of salvation is given to us by God, or, that we obtain it by the gift of God.¹⁰⁵

This controversy is irrelevant because the point is clear—faith is not a work.

Verses 8 and 9 say, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” Lloyd-Jones claims that, “If it is my belief that saves me I have saved myself; but Paul says that it is not of yourself.”¹⁰⁶ Faith is never the cause of salvation. The grace of God through Christ is the cause of salvation.¹⁰⁷

While man is dead, he cannot produce faith that would be acceptable to God. Sinners are not capable to go to God and beg for the gift.¹⁰⁸ Why would man, an enemy of God in his mind and heart, try to obtain God’s favor? He would not, nor would he ask for life. If he could ask, he would already be alive. But God made us alive, salvation is wholly of Him, and therefore, boasting is excluded. Salvation is “by grace” and out of His “mercy;” man is apostate; he cannot will anything towards salvation.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). Paul explicitly refers to God as active and He is the One who is working. Man is passive, dead in sin, until he is made alive. There is no activity of man that he could fill to assist God. It is man who died and God who followed him into death by dying and raising sinners to new life.

¹⁰⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, 45.

¹⁰⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Epistles of Paul To The Galatians and Ephesians* trans. by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 228-9.

¹⁰⁶ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, 136.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, 424.

Paul tells us that all good works are the fruit of regeneration¹⁰⁹ and therefore making any good work an aspect of grace.¹¹⁰ “We are God’s workmanship” refers to the new life in Christ, not the original creation in Adam. Being born of man, we are depraved and enslaved to sin and wickedness, but by the power of God, we are born from above by the Spirit for righteousness. The workmanship¹¹¹ of God is His creation of new beings out of the old. Bruce commenting says we are “His [God’s] work of art, His masterpiece.”¹¹² God created a “work of art” out of the old creation. Believers, who were dead in trespasses and sins, are made alive together with, raised together with, and seated together with Christ, created in Christ for the purpose of good works. Good works are the product of God’s grace, and not of us.

We do not do good works because they save or help maintain salvation. We do good works because we are already saved. We perform them by grace out of gratitude to the Father, to please Him. Jesus said, “If you love me you will obey my commands.” Erdman, writing of good works comments, “They are the fruit and result, not the root or cause, of salvation.”¹¹³ Only a believer can perform truly good works ascribed to grace because he is God’s workmanship created to do good works. Those who continue to “walk” in their trespasses and sins are not God’s workmanship, whatever they profess.¹¹⁴ Non-believers are not re-created to do good works; they are dead in trespasses and sins, which enslave them. All good works necessarily result from grace performed by those who are God’s workmanship.

¹⁰⁹ Regeneration is God making us alive with Christ in Eph 2:4.

¹¹⁰ John Calvin, 229.

¹¹¹ The word “workmanship” is translated from ποιημα literally “what is made.”

¹¹² F. F. Bruce, 52.

¹¹³ Charles R. Erdman, 47.

¹¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, 52.

Believers are created in Christ to do good works, of which he most certainly will perform because God has prepared them in advance. This display of good works is the “supreme manifestation of God’s power...making it possible for us, through faith, to live lives of holiness, of beauty, and of service.”¹¹⁵

Before performing a single good work, God prepared the good works, which he wanted us to “walk.” “What Paul says is not that God prepared *us* that we would walk in good works, but that he prepared the good works” that we might walk in them.¹¹⁶ All the works are ready; they wait for their doing by those for whom they have been prepared.¹¹⁷ While these works are of divine preparation, they are at the same time human responsibility. Jesus illustrated this principle when He said, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus by their fruit you will recognize them.”¹¹⁸

Relationship between Faith and Works

Salvation by faith, independent of works, is an essential aspect of justification, but this aspect is not the whole picture of salvation. David Kuske claims the NIV translation of verse 10 is wrong. The NIV says, “...created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” He concludes that the meaning of “*epi*” (ἐπι) in verse 10 is better rendered “for the purpose of” rather than “to do.”¹¹⁹ His understanding of verse 10 is to effectually mean, “created

¹¹⁵ Charles R. Erdman, 48.

¹¹⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, 427.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 428.

¹¹⁸ Matt 7:16-20.

¹¹⁹ David P. Kuske, “Does Ephesians 2:10 Teach Sanctification or Not,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 92 (1995): 51-2.

in Christ Jesus *for the purpose of* good works.” The preposition *epi* (ἐπι) unites faith with works.

Paul is teaching that while works never save or merit favor from God, they are a necessary result of one’s faith. At the same time, Paul never defines faith as purely intellectual¹²⁰ or as a grasp of theological concepts apart from the “doing,” but as the “total response to and involvement with Jesus Christ.” It is an active—walking—reliance on God apart from all works, but works are a consequence of faith.¹²¹ Therefore, all true “good works” are by grace because they flow from God’s initiative and His preparing them in advance.

According to Paul, faith has two aspects—the justifying aspect¹²² and the “being made alive with Christ”¹²³ aspect.¹²⁴ These two aspects are always present together and are never alone. If one is justified, he is regenerated, and vice versa. Those whom God created for doing good works will necessarily perform them.¹²⁵ It is by faith that we are justified and created in Christ for the purpose of doing good works. Lorenzen says faith is always obedient faith; salvation by faith apart from works never negates the necessity of works.¹²⁶ He continues,

Works are therefore the natural consequence of faith. Faith lives out of God and brings God’s nature to expression. The Christian is therefore exhorted to become what he is; to let the fruit of the Spirit come to expression in his life. But this does not mean that man can relate to God by virtue of his own achievements. If that were the case, who could qualify? God loves man for what he is, not for what he does.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Sharyn Dowd, 202.

¹²¹ Thornwald Lorenzen, 233.

¹²² right standing before God

¹²³ regeneration

¹²⁴ James M. Boice, 72.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Thornwald Lorenzen, 233.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Faith justifies the sinner by uniting him with Christ, and it also certainly produces the good works that God prepared in advance to be performed. The entire Christian life is of grace. Justifying faith is a gift from God and all good works that flow out of faith are the products of God's Spirit reflecting the nature of God as the believer is created to do. Man merits nothing for he is the conduit of the Spirit producing faith and good works.

Chapter 4: Historical Review

*Faith of our fathers! Living still In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword, O how our
hearts beat high with joy Whene'er we hear that glorious word: faith of our
fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death.*

-Fredrick W. Faber-

Introduction

The relationship between faith and works or justification and sanctification, is the point where Roman Catholic and Protestant Theology fundamentally differ. The church, according to Luther, taught that individuals gained favor and acceptance from God on the basis of status and achievements, rather than the grace of God. Luther might have been mistaken due to the level of confusion within the church. The doctrine of justification is where the confusion was at its greatest.¹ No one could tell him the church's position on the matter of justification. The most recent declaration recognized by the church that related to the doctrine of justification was dated 418, which did little to clarify the church's position more than a thousand years later in 1518.² According to Roman teaching, the works of man have merit and therefore contribute to justification. McGrath, describing Luther's early teaching³ writes, "...the sinner is able to do something which

¹ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1988), 105.

² Ibid., 32.

³ In his early teaching, Luther was a faithful follower of the views of the *via moderna* or 'Nominalism.' This movement's view of justification was Pelagian. God accepted people on the condition that he fulfills certain demands. For further study read Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought An Introduction* (Maldin, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), pages 74-76.

ensures that God responds by justifying him or her...Nevertheless, a definite human effort is required to place God under an obligation to reward the sinner with grace.”⁴

Through much study, Luther was convinced that the church did not understand the Gospel. The issue of justification was a matter of life and death for the church. Luther called it “the article by which the church stands or falls.” The church did not grasp the role of grace in salvation. The theologian who defended the concept of grace the most forcefully was Augustine of Hippo, which is why he became known as ‘the doctor of grace.’⁵ He emphasized that salvation was by grace alone because he understood this doctrine in light of the backdrop of human depravity. Getting a grasp on salvation by grace puts works in their proper place. It was during the Reformation that the writings of Augustine as well as the New Testament writings of Paul were of renewed interest. Historically, it was from the confusion revolving around the doctrine of justification that Protestantism was born.⁶

The Reformed understanding of the proper relationship between justification and sanctification and particularly the roles of faith and works will be discussed from the writings of Saint Augustine, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. Augustine will represent the thought as developed in the early 5th century. John Calvin will represent the mature Reformation view in the 16th century and Jonathan Edwards will represent the Puritan view of the 18th century.

Saint Augustine

Augustine saw an organic unity of the whole human race and corporate solidarity with Adam. Adam’s rebellion affected the entire human race. Augustine writes in his

⁴ McGrath, 106.

⁵ Ibid., 103.

⁶ Timothy George, 62.

“Confessions,” that he was struck with illness that all but carried him off to hell loaded with all the evil he committed against God, himself, and others and a host of other offenses over and above the bond of original sin, “by which we all have died with Adam.”⁷ Augustine described humanity as a “mass of perdition.” After the fall, man lost his ability to not sin, which he referred to as, *non posse non peccare*. Resulting from Adam’s fall, all humanity is born under the sentence of death with all its consequences. In *The Enchiridion* Augustine writes,

Thence, after his [Adam] sin, he was driven into exile, and by his sin the whole race of which he was the root was corrupted in him, and thereby subjected to the penalty of death. And so it happens that all descended from him, and from the woman who had led him into sin, and was condemned at the same time with him, --being the offspring of carnal lust on which the same punishment of disobedience was visited, --were tainted with the original sin, and were by it drawn through divers errors and sufferings into that last and endless punishment which they suffer in common with the fallen angels, their corrupters and masters, and the partakers of their doom. And thus ‘by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.’ By ‘the world’ the apostle, of course, means in this place the whole human race.⁸

Adam’s fallen condition is passed on to all his progeny. Man has a sinful nature, the predisposition to sin. Man has lost his freedom to obey God in his natural condition; he is inclined toward evil and is under the wrath of God. Augustine writes,

Thus, then, matters stood. The whole mass of the human race was under condemnation, was lying steeped and wallowing in misery, and was being tossed from one form of evil to another, and, having joined the faction of the fallen angels, was paying the well-merited penalty of that impious rebellion. For whatever the wicked freely do through blind and unbridled lust, and whatever they suffer against their will in the way of open punishment, this all evidently pertains to the just wrath of God.⁹

All actual sin is based on or grounded in man’s fallen nature. In three ways man is guilty of Adam’s sin—fallen short of God’s holy standard. First, man is guilty because his representative has rebelled against God. Secondly, man is guilty because all of humanity

⁷ Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 101-2.

⁸ Augustine, *The Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. by J. F. Shaw, in Augustine, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, ed. Whitney J. Oates, 2 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948), chap. 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 27.

is organically connected to Adam, meaning that we played a role in the fall and were in some sense present at the fall in Adam through whom we participated. And thirdly, man is guilty because man continues to commit sin, which demonstrates the sinful nature that has been passed down to us from Adam.¹⁰

Only God's grace can reverse the effect of Adam's rebellion. In Augustine's view, salvation is never rooted in the works of man nor is salvation by the will of man; rather, it is by the grace of God through faith.¹¹

Prior to Augustine, little attention was devoted to the nature of faith, although it was always acknowledged as the necessary means of salvation. Augustine, contemplating over the issues of faith, claimed that man could not produce faith, for it does not originate in man, but is rather a gift of God.¹² He writes,

And lest men should arrogate to themselves the merit of their own faith at least, not understanding that this too is the gift of God, this same apostle, who says in another place that he had "obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful," here also adds: "and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."¹³

Augustine used the term in different ways. He spoke of faith at times as an intellectual assent of truth. But justifying faith was more; it consisted of love and self-surrender. Saving faith was perfected in love and was the motivation or ground of good works. Augustine did not have a proper understanding of the relationship between faith and justification. This could have been due to the fact that he did not have a proper connection between justification and sanctification.¹⁴ It is evident from his writings that

¹⁰ Frank James, "Lesson 12: History of Christianity I" (Lecture, Reformed Theological Seminary, Virtual, Charlotte, 2003).

¹¹ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap 30.

¹² Ibid. chap 31.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Louis Berkhof, 496.

works performed by man had no role to fill in justification, but rather he contributed it to the grace of God that he regarded as sovereign and efficacious.¹⁵

Fallen man cannot perform good works unless the grace of God has freed him from the bondage of sin. Adam destroyed his will by the deliberate choice to rebel against God in the garden. Due to the organic unity of the human race, this act of disobedience destroyed the will of all men. The freedom of the will was removed and man cannot give himself the freedom it once enjoyed. Augustine writes,

For what good work can a lost man perform, except so far as he has been delivered from perdition? Can they do anything by the free determination of their own will? Again I say, God forbid. For it was by the evil use of his free-will that man destroyed both it and himself. For, as a man who kills himself must, of course, be alive when he kills himself, but after he has killed himself ceases to live, and cannot restore himself to life; so, when man by his own free-will sinned, then sin being victorious over him, the freedom of his will was lost. "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." This is the judgment of the Apostle Peter. And as it is certainly true, what kind of liberty, I ask, can the bond-slave possess, except when it pleases him to sin? For he is freely in bondage who does with pleasure the will of his master. Accordingly, he who is the servant of sin is free to sin. And hence he will not be free to do right, until, being freed from sin, he shall begin to be the servant of righteousness.¹⁶

The grace of God is necessary for man's will to possess true liberty. The will, in bondage to sin, sins freely and cannot do right until by grace it is set free from sin. The will, when free from sin's reign, is a servant of righteousness. The gift of grace results in the necessary performing of good works. God's grace transforms the fallen will and frees it from bondage and makes man into a new creation. Where man naturally desired to sin, he now desires to do good. Good works are evidence of justifying faith. This does not mean that redeemed man is not still affected by sin. Man, although no longer ruled by sin, is not perfectly free from all its influence. Augustine writes,

¹⁵ Ibid., 512.

¹⁶ Augustine, *The Enchiridion*, chap 30.

And test it should be thought that good works will be wanting in those who believe, he adds further: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." We shall be made truly free, then, when God fashions us, that is, forms and creases us anew, not as men--for He has done that already--but as good men, which His grace is now doing, that we may be a new creation in Christ Jesus, according as it is said: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." For God had already created his heart, so far as the physical structure of the human heart is concerned; but the psalmist prays for the renewal of the life which was still lingering in his heart.¹⁷

Augustine was the first to develop definite ideas about sanctification, which influenced the church in the Middle Ages. He did not distinguish between justification and sanctification, but held the view that sanctification was included in justification. He believed in the total corruption of human nature, and sanctification was a new supernatural impartation of the divine life. An important element in sanctification is the personal love for Christ, but he viewed grace as metaphysical—God deposits it in man. He did not stress the primary role of faith as the transforming factor in the believer's life. Justification included the infusion of divine grace in the soul. Grace comes from the inexhaustible treasury of the merits of Christ and its imputation to the believers by the sacraments.

From God's perspective, grace removes original sin and imparts intrinsic righteousness and gives the ability to do good works. From man's perspective, "supernatural works of faith working through love have merit before God and secure an increase of grace." These good works are not possible apart from the grace of God. This process was known as justification rather than sanctification. This process consisted in making man just before the judgment of God.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., chap 31.

¹⁸ Louis Berkhof, 529-30.

John Calvin

The doctrine of justification by faith is the most central aspect of Calvin's theological system.¹⁹ In his *Institutes*, Calvin refers to justification as "the main hinge on which religion turns." He writes, "For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety towards God."²⁰

All men are prone to God's holy wrath resulting from original sin.²¹ Original sin corrupted all aspects of man. Everything man does is tainted with this affect. Calvin defines original sin as, "...a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls 'works of flesh' (Gal. 5:19)."²² Resulting from original sin is a life characterized by the flesh. The mind is set on the desires of the flesh, which in turn affect the motives and actions of man. Everything man does violates God's holy law. Man is enslaved to the flesh and is helpless to move toward God. Calvin writes,

Because of the bondage of sin by which the will is held bound, it cannot move toward good, much less apply itself thereto; for a movement of this sort is the beginning of conversion to God, which in Scripture is ascribed entirely to God's grace.²³

Man being dead in sins, is spiritually dead. "As spiritual death is nothing else than the alienation of the soul from God, we are all born as dead men, and we live as dead men, until we are made partakers of the life of Christ..."²⁴

¹⁹ W. Stanford Reid, "Justification By Faith According To John Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980): 291.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, J. T. McNeill, ed., F. L. Battles, trans., (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.11.1.

²¹ Original sin is the first sin of Adam imputed to all men in which corrupted the whole man.

²² *Insts.* 2.1.8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.3.5.

Salvation from spiritual death and all it encompasses is received only by faith. God the Father, out of love, gave Christ to be grasped and possessed in faith. Receiving Christ reconciles man to God through Christ's righteousness and sanctifies him for the purpose of cultivating a blameless and pure life.

God is the cause of justification and there is no role for man to fulfill to make him worthy of justification. Man receives God's acceptance and is justified only by His "divine goodness."²⁵ Reid commenting on God's motive writes, "Yet as one studies both the *Institutes* and his commentaries, one finds that the love of God is a major theme which he continually elaborates. He always comes back to it as the *fons et origo* of man's salvation."²⁶ God is never motivated by any work of man nor could man obligate Him in any way.

Faith is not something man manufactured. Calvin taught that true faith originates with God who gives it to the elect.²⁷ Faith is a gift of God's mercy in regeneration, which resulted from our union with Christ. Regeneration enables man to have true knowledge of God's wrath and mercy, which results in true faith. Therefore, we can clearly understand why Calvin rejected the role of works in justification²⁸ and defended the doctrine of faith alone against the notion of works or a syncretism of faith and works as the Roman doctrines teach.²⁹ The gift of faith, independent of all human efforts, justifies the sinner before God by the imputation of Christ's righteousness.³⁰

²⁴ Eph 2:1 (Where Scripture references are given, the reference is to Calvin's Commentaries.)

²⁵ W. Stanford Reid, 291.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 296.

²⁸ *Insts.* 3.11.13.

²⁹ Ibid., 3.11.14.

³⁰ Ibid., 3.11.18.

While works play no role in justification, they are the result of true faith. Good works have no merit in themselves because they are not righteous. All works, ceremonial or moral, are corrupted by sin³¹ and our hearts are never pure and therefore are not good enough to meet the law's demands. Calvin defines faith as,

...a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.³²

Faith, based on the promise of God and rooted in the knowledge of Christ, is never alone.

Calvin rejects the notion that faith is *only* a concession of the promise of God,³³ but understood it to be connected with good works. Calvin writes,

For we dream neither of a faith devoid of good works nor of a justification that stands without them. This alone is of importance: having admitted that faith and good works must cleave together, we still lodge justification in faith, not in works.³⁴

Calvin saw no separation between justification and sanctification. He further writes, "Yet you could not grasp this [justification] without at the same time grasping sanctification also."³⁵ Whomever Christ justifies, He sanctifies; justification and sanctification are joined with an "everlasting and indissoluble bond."³⁶

There is a real connection between faith and works in the same way there is a real connection between justification and sanctification. These can be distinguished, but never separated. Faith without good works is a "moral and spiritual impossibility."³⁷ Calvin placed justification in faith, because it is the work of Christ that justifies us, not

³¹ Ibid., 3.11.17.

³² Ibid., 3.2.7.

³³ Jas 2:14.

³⁴ *Insts.* 3.16.1.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ R. C. Sproul, 160.

our work.³⁸ While Calvin stressed justification by faith, he does not ignore regeneration.

God works by his Spirit in the renewal of life. Reid writes,

...the foundation of the Christian's new life is a 'true and living faith' which is nourished and strengthened day by day through the working of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies the Christian by enabling him to perform good works to the glory of God, subduing the lusts of the flesh, obeying the law and showing love to the brethren.³⁹

Calvin rejected the idea of faith being a good work. He referred to the concept as "foolery" and rejects the idea that faith itself has any merit.⁴⁰ Man, apart from God's grace, cannot attribute to himself a single good work, not even faith. All good works are the result of God's grace.⁴¹ Good works not only conform to the law of God, but they result from a motive of love for God. Unbelievers are not capable of works that are pleasing to God. The unregenerate are never motivated by love for God. Although, the works of the regenerate are acceptable, even though they are imperfect, because God works through man by His Spirit to produce these good works. Calvin writes, "...nothing else but that God's children are pleasing and lovable to him, since he sees in them the marks and features of his own countenance." He continues,

But because the godly, encompassed with mortal flesh, are still sinners, and their good works are as yet incomplete and redolent of the vices of the flesh, he can be propitious neither to the former nor to the latter unless he embrace them in Christ rather than in themselves.⁴²

Only in union with Christ are works regarded as good because they result from the work of the Holy Spirit, which God accepts by grace. Good works are never truly good in and of themselves.

Faith is not self-generated, but is a gift from God and it is certain knowledge of God's goodness rooted in the promise in Christ and revealed to our minds and sealed in

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ W. Stanford Reid, 303.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 304.

⁴¹ *Insts.* 2.3.12.

⁴² Ibid., 3.17.5.

our hearts by the Holy Spirit. While man is saved by faith, his faith is never void of works. Calvin taught that man is incapable of performing good works apart from the grace of God. Prior to regeneration or after, all works are tainted with sin. But God, by his grace, accepts the works of the regenerated as good in Christ. Calvin saw a necessary connection between faith and good works in the same way that justification cannot be separated from sanctification. Man is justified by faith alone and no work of man is meritorious, but true saving faith always accompanies works.

Jonathan Edwards

Edwards held that all men are born with original sin, which he defines as the “innate sinful depravity of the heart.” Original sin has two aspects according to Edwards. The first is that human nature is depraved. In the disposition of the heart lies all uprightness or wickedness of all moral qualities. Edwards points out that the heart has a “true tendency” that proceeds from its disposition. Edwards concludes that fallen man has a natural inclination to sin; this ‘tendency’ is natural to the “natural man.” For Edwards says,

...if there be any thing in the nature of man whereby he has an universal unfailing tendency to that moral evil which, according to the real nature and true demerit of things as there are in themselves, implies his utter ruin, that must be looked upon as an evil tendency or propensity.⁴³

The heart has a moral depravity and therefore man has a tendency to sin. “Then may it be said, man’s nature or state is attended with a pernicious or destructive tendency in a moral sense.”⁴⁴

The second is that original sin is the imputation of Adam’s rebellion to all his progeny. Edwards uses many passages of Scripture to support this doctrine.⁴⁵ Edwards

⁴³ Ola Elizabeth Winslow ed., *Jonathan Edwards Basic Writings*. (New York: New American Library, 1966.), 227.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

concludes that this sinful tendency resulted from the imputation of Adam's sin to the entire human race.

Because of original sin and its effects, Edwards emphasized justification by faith alone. Justification is by the works of Christ alone and not the works of man. Man cannot merit justification, but in union with Christ, the works⁴⁶ of Christ are imputed to the believer through faith. Edwards linked the believers' union with Christ to the imputation of Christ's righteousness, just as Adam's sin and fallen nature was imputed to all men.⁴⁷ Therefore, through faith man is justified on the ground of Christ's perfection alone.

Faith is based on knowledge because it is rational. Faith is a reliance of the soul on the sufficiency of God. Knowledge of Christ must be present before the soul can be united to Christ. Faith is "that by which the soul is united to Christ."⁴⁸ Faith is not only intellectual or rational. Faith "is an ascent of the soul to what it understands."⁴⁹ Edwards distinguishes between the unbelievers and the believers in that the believers "gladly acquiesce in their knowledge of Christ." Unbelievers may have true knowledge but never truly submit to or embrace that knowledge. Faith is not a profession only. Justifying faith not only involves the intellect, but it is an inclination and an act of the will toward God.⁵⁰ True faith has the distinctive character of love and is the whole soul receiving Christ. Only the faith that works by love has value to God.

⁴⁵ Rom 3:10-18, which states that no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God, and that all have turned away, and no one does good, and etc.

⁴⁶ or righteousness

⁴⁷ John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards, Evangelist* (Hereafter cited as *Evan.*) (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), 142.

⁴⁸ John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Hereafter cited as *RBT.*) Vol. 3 (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 1993), 204.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Only a work of God can change man's motive away from sin and toward good. When the Holy Spirit resides in a person, repentance—a change of mind—takes place. Conversion was a turning to God from sin, which he attributed to God alone; man could not will himself to such an act.⁵¹ A change of mind is a willing to do good because “those controlled by the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Romans 8:8).

Faith alone justifies, but true faith, according to Edwards, is “seen by God as a continuing fruitful faith. In other words, the believer's good works are absolutely necessary to justification, although they contribute nothing meritorious to it.”⁵² Edwards asked why good works are necessary. He upheld that it is not to earn salvation. Men cannot be saved by any work of their own, but without them there is no salvation. Then he says that God appointed that man should be saved in no other way. In a sermon on Galatians 5:6 he wrote,

...there is no room left for any one to say that they have faith which justifies and that they need take no care about works and so to give themselves a liberty in sinning because they ben't under the law but under grace; for tho' tis only faith that justifies yet there is no faith that justifies but a working faith; so that it is as impossible that any person should be saved without works as if they were justified upon the account of their works. It is as impossible that men should be saved without an evangelical, universal and sincere obedience under the second covenant as it was that they should be saved without a perfect obedience under the first covenant.⁵³

Works under the new covenant are a necessary evidence of the faith that justifies and the basis on which Christ obtained salvation for Himself and the elect. Edwards stressed that holiness was a necessary requirement for salvation. Edwards defines, holiness, “as conformity of the heart and not merely outward conformity to God's holy

⁵¹ John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 61-62.

⁵² John H. Gerstner, *Evan.*, 50.

⁵³ John H. Gerstner, *RBT*, 225-6.

law.”⁵⁴ Edwards gives four reasons for the requirement of holiness. First, he says that it is contrary to make the wicked equally happy with those that are holy. God’s justice requires Him to punish sin.⁵⁵ Second, God cannot embrace sinful creatures. “It is therefore as impossible for an unholy thing to be admitted unto the happiness of heaven as it is for God not to be, or be turned to nothing.”⁵⁶ For God to love sin or a sinful man is an impossibility. Edwards writes,

It is impossible that God should love sin as it is for him to cease to be, and it is as impossible for him to love a wicked man that has not his sin purified. And it is as impossible for him to enjoy the happiness of heaven except God love him for the happiness of heaven consists in the enjoyment of God’s love.⁵⁷

Third, God cannot love sinful men because a love would defile God and heaven. And fourth, it is impossible that the wicked should inherit heaven. The sin nature of man makes it necessary that the sinner be unable to be truly happy. Sin is a tyrant and its nature is rebellious and therefore it could never be truly happy. An unholy person will not see heaven.

Later, Edwards had six reasons for holiness. The additions are the Holy Spirit who “promotes and infuses holiness.”⁵⁸ And Edwards spoke of love for God, the core characteristic of the believer, which makes the believer enmity to anything that is contrary to Him.

Edwards saw that faith was fruitful. The Christian lives a life of good works because faith in Christ is always accompanied with the grace to perform works in obedience to the law. Faith is infused with virtue, which every believer possesses. The Christian is not content to continue to sin; he longs to be perfectly

⁵⁴ Ibid., 226.

⁵⁵ Exod 34:3 and Num 14:18

⁵⁶ John H. Gerstner, *RBT*, 226.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 227.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

obedient. He is not completely happy as long as sin remains. Therefore the Christian militates against sin and all costs. He does not neglect any duty and hates sins of omission and commission and makes every effort to live perfectly in this life.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 228.

Chapter 5: Synthesis of James and Paul

Above all, you must understand that no prophesy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

-2 Peter 1:20-21-

Does James contradict Paul or does he complement him? James stresses that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone, while Paul stresses justification by faith alone and not by works. Is the relationship between faith and works different for James as it is for Paul? Since the doctrine of justification is “the main hinge on which religion turns” it is essential that this matter be investigated. A variety of solutions have been proposed by commentators to answer this question.

Possible Solutions

(1) James 2 demonstrated that works are required for salvation. This view argued that justification depends on both faith and works. When Paul argued that justification was apart from works, he was referring to works of law. Paul was arguing against Judaizers who held that one had to perform the works of Old Testament law to be acceptable to God. Paul was saying that these works of law could not justify. But James was addressing those works¹ that all Christians are required to perform.²

(2) Paul was writing about eternal salvation, while James was writing about the liberation of the effects of sin of those who were already saved. James was addressing

¹ works of love (i.e. feed hungry and give to the poor)

² Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: Herder, 1964), 354; E. H. Plumptre, *The General Epistle of St. James*, Cambridge Bible for School and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1876), 75.

the temporal judgment for sin and the believer's acquittal before others, but not in the sense of salvation as friends of God or as carnal Christians. He was addressing the relationship or lack thereof between a believer and God that would demonstrate that they are a true disciple or a carnal Christian.³

(3) James was teaching that justification depends on both faith and works and that he was directly contradicting Paul. Paul clearly taught that justification was by faith alone. This proposal places James and Paul's teaching in contrast. This view does not uphold the inerrancy of Scripture.⁴

(4) James and Paul had different purposes for their writings. They each used their terms⁵ with different meanings. Paul was interested in expressing the basis on which a person has a right standing before God;⁶ while James was interested in demonstrating that a believer's true conversion is warranted by works and he wanted to refute the prevalent antinomianism he faced. Paul was writing in regard to a forensic declaration of righteousness, while James was writing of an outward demonstration of righteousness. James was teaching that true faith is proved genuine by works and a confession void of works is not the result of regeneration.⁷

While these proposed solutions are brief, a discussion demonstrating the errors of the first three proposals will not be discussed due to the length required.⁸ The following

³ Zane Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character through Testing* (Irving, TX.: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 41-42, 60-72.

⁴ James Hardy Ropes, 34-36; E. C. Blackman, 93; J. T. Sanders, 115-8.

⁵ The terms faith and works.

⁶ i.e. justification

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, 309-317; James Adamson, 34-36; R. C. Sproul, 160-71; Colin Brown, "Righteousness, Justification," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1986), 3:365-73; John MacArthur Jr., *James*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 119-42.

⁸ For a further discussion on each view, see the works cited.

discussion will demonstrate that the fourth proposal is most theologically and biblically accurate.

A Different Use of Terms

The fourth proposal states that James and Paul used terms differently. James wrote in verse 24, “You see that by works a man is justified and not out of faith alone.”⁹ This seems to directly contradict Paul who wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this not by you, God’s gift; not by works, in order that no one [can] boast. For you are His handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of good works which God prepared beforehand, in order that in them you walk.”¹⁰ If James and Paul define the terms faith and works similarly, then the contradiction is clear.

Words in every language have a variety of meanings. The dictionary demonstrates the assortment of semantic uses. The same word can have an array of different meanings, while another word may have a narrower range. These semantic ranges do not cause difficulty because a reader is aided by its context. The context is usually enough to clarify the words’ correct meaning. This principle is true for the Biblical languages.¹¹ The terms in James and Paul fit the normal range of semantic use. And knowing that the Bible is inerrant, these verses cannot contradict; they must have different meanings attached to them. The historical context above has already demonstrated that the meanings of these words are different.

⁹ Translation mine.

¹⁰ Translation mine.

¹¹ William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction To Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 185.

Faith and Works in James

James demonstrated and contrasted a “dead” faith, which is a confession void of works, with a “living” faith, which is demonstrated through obedience to God. James used the term “faith” in two ways. The first was that of his opponent and the second was his own.¹² He demonstrated that the faith of his opponent was counterfeit. “This faith” as James referred to it, was an “intellectual acceptance of a theological assertion” less than that of demons.¹³ The object of his opponent’s faith was Judaism as described in the *Shema*. This particular faith is “alone” and therefore void of works. James was writing to condemn “bogus” faith, while he was describing true justifying faith. True faith entails the union of faith with works. The confession or mental understanding of orthodoxy was only part of the faith that justifies. James’ faith was two-pronged, the right belief and its union with works.¹⁴ James pressed beyond the mental grasp of his opponent to where behavior and the will are affected.¹⁵ James always used the term “works” positively to mean obedience to God, which included “acts of charity.”¹⁶ The works to which James refers are post-conversion works. James inseparably links faith to works. Faith is demonstrated through the production of good works; and good works stem from faith. James did not teach salvation by works or that works maintained salvation. Salvation is a gift.¹⁷

James’ point to his antinomian audience was that true faith produces works of love and is more than simply a confession or mental grasp. This is why James wrote that

¹² Robert H. Stein, 5.

¹³ Douglas J. Moo, 107.

¹⁴ Robert V. Rakestraw, 37.

¹⁵ Douglas J. Moo, 107.

¹⁶ Robert H. Stein, 7; Douglas J. Moo, 101-2.

¹⁷ Jas 1:18.

one “is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (2:24). True faith is inseparable from the works it produces.¹⁸ James illustrated that works “perfect” faith and that works “justify” the believer because the works demonstrate true faith.

Faith and Works in Paul

Paul used the term “faith” as the mode by which salvation comes. Jesus Christ is the object of true faith.¹⁹ Salvation is the initiative of God by which faith is given to man as a gift. Faith is a whole-hearted trust in God for the grace required for salvation, which is given independently from any efforts or works of man.²⁰ Faith, like works, is never the cause of salvation. This is why Paul wrote, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works” (Ephesians 2:8). Paul used the term works in two ways similar to the way James spoke of faith in two ways. The first way Paul used the term “works” was negative and the second was positive. Negatively, he used it to stress that works do not merit salvation.²¹ There are no pre-conversion works that grant eternal life.²² Paul repeatedly argued that justification was not earned by “works of law,” or by any work of love. Grace is the cause of salvation.²³ He spoke of works positively when he stressed the necessity of works. Faith results in a new life in Jesus that is characterized by good works. Faith is always obedient. This is why Paul told us that we are created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works.²⁴

¹⁸ Matthew Henry, 792.

¹⁹ Eph 2:4-7.

²⁰ Robert H. Stein, 6.

²¹ Eph 2:9.

²² Homer A. Kent Jr., 36.

²³ Matthew Henry, 557.

²⁴ Eph 2:10.

Synthesis of James 2:24 and Ephesians 2:8-10

The difficulty with reconciling these passages occurs when it is assumed that the vocabulary is identical. The terms “faith” and “works,” when applied in similar fashion to each passage, produce an obvious contradiction. James uses the term “faith” with both a positive and a negative aspect. In the same way, Paul uses works both positively and negatively.²⁵ Faith for Paul is used only in the positive;²⁶ similarly, works is used only positively in James.²⁷ When these uses are not distinguished and the natural emphasis of Paul is read into James and vice versa, confusion results. Also, the perspectives by which James and Paul wrote are essential to properly reconcile the apparent contradiction. Paul emphasized how a person is saved, while James emphasized the kind of faith that saves.²⁸

The slogan of the Reformation, “by faith alone” explicitly teaches Paul’s negative use of the law. Paul’s teaching of justification by faith alone is written with great clarity and power. One unquestionably grasps the force of Paul’s argument that works do not lead to salvation because works are antithetical to grace.²⁹ It is this negative aspect of works that naturally comes to mind when reading Paul. If the positive aspect of works is not understood, then Paul’s full teaching of the relationship between faith and works is missed and the Gospel is not fully grasped. Neglecting the positive aspect of works will lead to a misunderstood definition of faith. Only comprehending the negative aspect of works will likely lead to the notion that faith is the “dead” faith that James condemns because it is “alone.” Faith could wrongly be defined as the mental agreement of

²⁵ Eph 2:9-10.

²⁶ Eph 2:8.

²⁷ Robert H. Stein, 7.

²⁸ R. E. Glaze, JR., “The Relationship of Faith to Works in James 1:22-25 and 2:14-26,” *Theological Educator: A Journal of Theology and Ministry* no 34 Fall (1986), 35.

²⁹ Rom 11:6.

orthodoxy, which results in justification. But this is not what Paul or James taught. To understand Paul correctly, both aspects of works need to be understood.

The slogan of the Reformation, while explicitly teaching the negative aspect of works, also implies the positive—post-conversion works. Paul wrote, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Galatians 5:6). Paul says this in Ephesians 2:10 when he wrote that we are created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works. These good works coincide with true faith and do not stand opposed to it. Paul’s teaching of faith in Ephesians 2:8-10 unfolds the theological as well and the practical elements of salvation—the faith that saves produces works.³⁰ With only grasping Paul’s negative aspect of works—that pre-conversion works do not save—and applying this to James 2:24, it becomes apparent that James and Paul are not teaching the same doctrine. James wrote, “You see that a man is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (2:24). This verse, in light of a misunderstood Paul, is teaching justification by pre-conversion works.

Faith for Paul was used only in the positive sense. Paul assumed, as Ephesians 2:10 teaches, that salvation, by faith alone which produces good works, justifies while pre-conversion works do not.

In verse 24, James used the term “faith” explicitly in the negative and implicitly in the positive. James explicitly used the term “faith” as his opponent understood it—an intellectual grasp of biblical truth.³¹ This is why he said, “...that a person is justified by what he does and not faith *alone*” (2:24).³² This verse can be restated, “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by an intellectual grasp of orthodoxy alone.”

³⁰ Thornwald Lorenzen, 233.

³¹ Douglas J. Moo, 107.

³² Emphasis mine.

Intellectual understanding is not enough for salvation. Paul's understanding of faith is the same as James; faith is obedient. Faith, for James and Paul, is an orthodox grasp of truth that demonstrates itself through loving works. When James and Paul are contrasted, it is assumed that they contradict, but really Paul and James' opponent contradicts. James and Paul are in accordance with each other. They just use the terms differently, while they are teaching the same principle.

James implied the positive use of faith, which is more than "dead" orthodoxy. It is a vibrant "living" faith that is obedient to God. This faith is demonstrated through post-conversion works. This is what James was teaching when he wrote, "You see a person is justified by what he does" (2:24). This verse can be restated, "You see that a person is justified by a faith that demonstrates itself through obedience to God and not by faith alone."

Works for James was used only in the positive sense. James assumed that works are united with faith. The works in James are those works of love for others. These are the works that justify. He never discussed works as pre-conversion, only as post-conversion.

James was speaking to an antinomian "Christian" audience who had already been taught the Gospel,³³ while Paul, in Ephesians, was speaking to many churches.³⁴ His missionary journeys were to non-believers, many of whom were Jewish as well as Gentile. Since it was his "ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known" (Romans 15:20), Paul stressed the negative aspect of works and refuted any merit of pre-conversion works. He attacked a "self-righteous legalism" of Judaism. James refuted the

³³ C. Ryan Jenkins, 73.

³⁴ Charles R. Erdman, 12.

“self-righteous indifference” of the antinomians.³⁵ These differing situations prompted the writers to address their audience in their Epistles the way they did. James stressed the works aspect of faith while Paul stressed the faith aspect. James’ audience had the right belief, but they did not live like it, which is why he stressed that justification was not by faith alone,³⁶ whereas Paul stressed faith alone³⁷ in the context of his audience’s influence of Judaism—acceptance before God was based on the keeping of the law.

Paul emphasized that works did not merit right standing before God. This is why he wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Paul is driving the point that salvation is completely the work of God and no human efforts are effectual. Paul stressed this aspect as a result of his audience, but he also used the term in the positive sense. The confusion occurs when we understand Paul’s use of works only in the negative; we then read into our comparison of Ephesians 2:8-10 and James 2:24 a clear contradiction. But understanding Paul’s positive use of the law, we can see a clear parallel between James and Paul. This positive use is what James had in mind when he said that justification was not by faith alone. James and Paul used the terms differently while they have the same understanding of the gospel.³⁸

James and Paul assigned different meanings to the terms “faith” and “works,” which fall well within their semantic ranges.³⁹ They both magnified that faith alone justifies. Paul emphasized the inadequacy of works for justification, while James magnified the inadequacy of faith without its necessary production of works. Ephesians

³⁵ Robert Rakestraw, 34.

³⁶ Jas 2:24; Robert V Rakestraw, 36; Peter Davids, 49.

³⁷ Eph 2:5,8.

³⁸ Robert H. Stein, 5.

³⁹ Ibid.

2:8-10 can be restated, “For by grace you have been saved, through a whole-hearted trust in God for the grace required for salvation, which is given independent from any efforts or works of man—it’s the gift of God so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created under His initiative in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works, which God prepared beforehand that we will necessarily walk in them.” And James 2:24 can be restated, “You see that a person is justified by a faith that demonstrates itself through obedience to God and not by an intellectual grasp of orthodoxy alone.” It would seem that Paul would not have opposed James’ statement nor would James have opposed Paul’s. Rather, James and Paul are teaching the same Gospel from different perspectives. They both teach that salvation is by faith alone, but this faith is necessarily demonstrated through good works.

Three Uses of the Law

In reformed theology, the law has a three-fold use. First, the law is to promote righteousness and curb sin. This assumes the sinfulness of man and makes the law a necessary rule. The law is the result of God’s common grace in the world.⁴⁰ The law referred to is not the Old Testament law, but the law written on men’s hearts.⁴¹ This law is for the preservation of the nations in general.

Second, the law is to convict man of sin⁴² and make him aware of the inability to follow its just requirements. The law in this case is the Old Testament law,⁴³ which is used as a teacher⁴⁴ to lead a sinner to Christ so that by faith he can be justified.⁴⁵ The

⁴⁰ Louis Berkhof, 614.

⁴¹ Rom 2:14-5.

⁴² Rom 3:20.

⁴³ The Old Testament law is referred to as the Decalogue.

⁴⁴ παιδαγωγος

⁴⁵ Gal 3:24.

sinner can then be acquiescent to the purpose of redemption.⁴⁶ The Decalogue was given on Mount Sinai to teach the Hebrews that they cannot follow the way of righteousness by works. Rather, this law was to expose their inability to live in accordance to God's standard and drive them to the righteousness found only in Christ by faith. For Christ is the end of the law.⁴⁷ This law does not impart life, but it leads to the One who does.

Third, the law is a rule of life for believers, describing their duties, and leading them in the way to life and salvation.⁴⁸ The law describes the way of holiness that all believers are to follow. This third use is only for the Christian who has already come to the savior by faith alone. It is this third use that Calvin says,

The third and principle use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God, that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law in two ways.⁴⁹

Calvin went on to describe these two ways. First, the law is the “best instrument” to teach the nature of the Lord's will that every Christian is to seek. And second, it is to exhort every Christian by meditating on it so it can arouse obedience. Calvin describes the law in relation to the flesh as “a whip to an idle and balky ass, to arouse it to work.”⁵⁰

In Ephesians 2:8-10, Paul has the second and third use in view. When he uses works in the negative, he has the second use of the law in view. The law was never designed to justify, but in the New Covenant, it is used to expose sin and lead to faith in Christ. It is at this point that Paul levels all meritorious efforts in law keeping. But once

⁴⁶ Louis Berkhof, 614.

⁴⁷ Rom 10:4.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Insts.*, 2.7.12.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

faith is established, Paul shifts to the third use of the law. Paul exhorts believers to live a righteous life as described in the Decalogue. The works are performed not for the purpose of salvation, but because of salvation. Works never earned righteousness, rather works display the righteousness already possessed in Christ.

James has only this third use of the law in mind. His audience may have heard a distorted understanding of Paul's teaching. James demonstrated that the true saving faith that alone justifies is lived out in the following of the law. It is this aspect of the law that his antinomian audience was in error. James was exhorting his readers to follow the law because it was the necessary demonstration of true faith.

Application

Behind every practice is a theory. Practice and theory are two aspects of the same activity; each affects the other. The teachings of James and Paul, as properly understood, are applicable to the church. Both Apostles are good reminders that a faithful theology must accommodate itself to the specific audience or congregation. For a pastor or teacher, the nature of the circumstance will dictate what to stress in the scripture. Pastors need to contextualize their message. But first, pastors need to understand the context in which the Biblical passage was written and for whom it was intended and why. By understanding this relationship, the pastor can speak meaningfully into his present context. The preaching of God's word will have meaning and power to those who hear.

In those congregations that emphasize "faith alone," while in doctrine are orthodox, but in practice are antinomian, James' stress on works needs to be the emphasis. But, those congregations that are legalistic in their practice, Paul's emphasis needs to be stressed. While stressing the aspect of faith or works can benefit a

congregation and edify it, the gospel in all its parts need to be clearly preached. It is Paul who said, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:1-2). The church is to proclaim salvation to all men. In its proclamation, the church must declare, without reservation, the “whole will”⁵¹ of God” (Acts 20:27). Every aspect is to be preached with a proper relation to all other aspects. The right “balance” will depend on the congregation, but where the “whole council of God” is preached, balance will reign.

The applications of this principle are limitless, but for the purpose of this task, the teaching of a faith that is animated by works is essential to the preaching of the whole Gospel. The preaching of faith, while neglecting the proper place of works, will lead to the faith James condemned. A faith that is fruitless and dead will result in dead orthodoxy. If the church is filled with those whose faith is dead, then the congregation will be dead. But the preaching that exhorts orthodoxy that is active in works will be a vibrant church; a church that is salt and light in the world. A church that testifies to the grace of God in the lives of His people which let their light shine before men, so that others may see their good deeds and praise God in heaven.⁵²

Modern Protestantism has so emphasized the “faith alone” motto of the Reformation that it minimizes God’s call for involvement with the poor, sick, and exploited. Does not the church focus more on its doctrine than its people? Christ is present in the Word and the sacraments, but He is also present with the Christians who suffer. Christ calls the church to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and clothe the

⁵¹ βουλην, meaning “counsel” or “purpose.”

⁵² Matt 5:14-16.

naked. After all, it was Jesus who said, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Every Christian is called upon to speak the Word and do what is necessary to further God’s kingdom and bring Him glory. This is precisely what James and Paul were teaching.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

*Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.
-Ecclesiastes 12:13-*

The proper role of works in the Christian life is essential for a healthy understanding of the Gospel. This work sheds light on the proper place of good works in the life of the believer as they relate to faith. James' Epistle has historically been controversial for its seemingly contradictory discussion on the place of works, especially in 2:24, while Paul's teaching has been normative in Protestant doctrine. This work investigates the relationship between faith and works in James 2:24 and Ephesians 2:8-10, while it maintained the integrity of the infallibility of scripture.

In chapter 5, it is argued that these two Apostles did not contradict, but were fighting different enemies. James was fighting against the antinomian or dead orthodoxy that was prevalent in James' audience. Paul was combating the legalists who tried to add works into the equation of salvation to obligate God. These different contexts provided the arena for the Gospel to be applied in differing ways. Furthermore, James used the terms "faith" and "works" differently from Paul. James was emphasizing to his antinomian audience that "faith alone" was not enough to warrant salvation. James understood that true saving faith was an obedient faith while his audience understood faith to be no more than a confession of the *Shema*. James maintained that faith necessarily produces good works, but good works do not merit salvation. Works, as

James used the term, meant post-conversion deeds that flowed from faith, but his audience understood that works were unnecessary. James emphasized that those deeds, which flow from faith, are in accordance with the law of God to demonstrate or “prove” the genuineness of faith.

Paul emphasized “faith” [alone] to his legalistic audience. He wanted to remove the notion that understood pre-conversion works to merit salvation. Salvation was by faith alone independent from works. Yet Paul did not understand “faith” to be simply a confession only as James’ audience did. Paul maintained that good works necessarily demonstrate faith. Paul stated that faith is to be expressed through love¹ as well as the fact that the Christian was created in Christ for the purpose of performing good works to glory of God’s name.²

By these differing perspectives, it is understood that James 2:24 does not contradict Paul as understood in Ephesians 2:8-10. Rather, they are in complete agreement with each other. James and Paul were addressing different questions. James was addressing the kind of faith that saves, while Paul was addressing how one is saved. Both James and Paul together could agree and could conclude that salvation is by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.

¹ Gal 5:6.

² Eph 2:10.

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