

"Faith and Works" James 2:14-26

Is justification by faith alone, or by faith and works... or both? Is there a hopeless contradiction between Paul and James? The Church has wrestled for centuries to reconcile the teaching of these two Apostles. By closely examining the work of each Apostle we will discover, security in the finished work of Christ, a clear pathway for our faith to grow to maturity, and accountability before our righteous Judge.

Romans 3:28; 4:5; (Define "justification")
James 2:24; Gal. 1:8-9

Martin Luther, writing his preface to the book of James, "[It] contradicts Paul by teaching justification by works." "St. James Epistle is really an epistle of straw compared to [St. Paul's letters], for it lacks this evangelical character."

Contradiction? One of them didn't get it right? One should be thrown out?

I. Context, context, context

A. To whom is the author writing? Audience:

Jewish – James 1:1
Brothers – Christians, not just Jews; James 2:1
15 times called brethren

If he doubted their salvation, why does he tell them to endure rather than presenting the gospel?

B. Why is he writing? Occasion: Trials, tribulations, temptations. Giving in. Not doing well.

1. Struggling with trials and temptations

- Trials, temptations – 1:2-3, 13-14
- Favoritism, partiality – 2:1, 9
- Tongue – 3:8-10; Prov. 13:3 (preserves his soul)
- Jealousy – 3:13-14
- Conflict – 4:1
- Selfishness – 4:2-3
- Gossip – 4:11
- Presumption, pride – 4:13

- Greed – 5:1-2
- 2. Under discipline from God – 5:14-16
- 3. Facing judgment – 5:9
- 4. In need of repentance – 4:8-10

C. In need of “salvation”

1. Salvation of the soul – James 1:21

Escaping hell never crossed their minds

Genesis 32:30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”

1 Samuel 19:11 Then Saul sent messengers to David’s house to watch him, in order to put him to death in the morning. But Michal, David’s wife, told him, saying, “If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death.”

Ezek 18:26-27 "When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die. 27 "Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life (soul; *nephesh*).

Proverbs 13:3 The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

Proverbs 16:17-18 The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who watches his way preserves his life.

Prov 19:16 He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is careless of his ways will die.

James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth **death**.

James – some of you are sick and dying because of sin

2. How can James’ readers be “saved”?

Become a doer of the word – 1:21-22, 25

In need of intervention on behalf of one another – 5:19-20

1:2-4 – a maturing faith

1:18 (from death, for reflecting God's character)

Message of James: Responding to trials and temptations in wise obedience will result in blessing and deliverance (salvation of the soul). Responding otherwise will result in conflict, frustration, discipline and possibly death.

II. Argument of James 2:14-26

READ 2:14 – save him from what?

Judgment – 2:12-13; 3:1

- Heaven or hell? Piper would say yes.
- According to works
- 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10
- Saved from a merciless judgment; saved from a useless life.
- Some think they are saved but are not. James isn't talking about them

Argument – One argument given 5 times. 2:14, 17, 20, 24, 26

2:14 – Faith separated from works can't save. what advantage, good, benefit

2:17 – Faith separated from works is dead

2:20 – Faith separated from works is useless. Idle, lazy, useless

2:24 – Faith separated from works can't "justify."

2:26 – Faith separated from works is dead

"Faith and works are inseparable for salvation from a useless life"
One argument illustrated 5 ways:

Illustration #1 – Care for needy Christians (2:15-17)

Illustration #2 – Hypothetical objection (2:18-20)

Illustration #3 – Abraham (2:21-24)

"Justify" = same justification?

Chronology of Abraham's life

Romans 4; Gal. 2 – Gen. 15 only

Gen. 22 = 20 years later

Faith perfected; friend of God (Jews, Christians, Muslims)

Two justifications – not only justified by faith; but also justified by faith and works

Illustration #4 – Rahab (2:25)

Rahab's background
Her works saved her *life*

Illustration #5 (Concluding analogy) – a dead body (2:26)

- faith = the human body
- works = the spirit, which gives life, vitality, power to our bodies
- Faith without works is not non-existent, it hasn't disappeared – it's simply dead, lifeless, powerless. It's doing no one any good.

There is no body; it never existed
This body was never alive; it never had a spirit
This body is not functioning according to its design
Why? Because body and spirit have been separated

Dead = Useless; of no practical value

Application

Complete assurance: Works are excluded for gift of righteousness that guarantees eternal life

Right standing with God through faith alone; eternal life guaranteed

Moment of faith, God saves you

Works are necessary for salvation from a useless life

Prov. 24:11-12 – accountable for ourselves and our brothers

1 Cor. 3; Judgment seat of Christ

Works that please God He alone can produce