

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Faith and Works

(Jerry Fite)

Paul writes, “*We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law*” (Romans 3:28). James pens, “*Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith*” (James 2:24). Being justified before God is in the balance. At first glance, Paul says justification is by faith apart from works. James points to being justified by works. Which is it, justification by works or justification by faith?

In September of 1522, Martin Luther had completed his translation of the Greek New Testament into the German language. In the preface of his Translation he wrote, “*St. James’s epistle is really a right strawy epistle, compared to these others [Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Peter, and 1 John], for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.*” His translation of the Greek text in Romans 3:28 added the word, “*allein*” (“alone” in English).

His addition to the inspired text is Luther’s backlash on the Papacy’s emphasis upon works. His assessment of the Book of James as “strawy” was that it was not a firm foundation for justification for it was devoid of the gospel. Martin Luther did not mind

adding to God’s word and taking away God’s word to stand his ground against the religious hierarchy of his day (cf. Revelation 22:18-19).

A closer look at Romans 3:28 and James 2:24 reveals why both passages should be incorporated unreservedly as foundations for our faith. Paul does not say faith justifies us apart from “works,” but more specifically, apart from “works of the law.” The law given through Moses could not justify man, unless he or she kept all the law all the time (Galatians 2:16, 3:10-13). James does not say that man is justified by works without faith, but not “only” by faith.

James is saying faith must be coupled with works for justification before God. These works are illustrated in the life of Abraham as “works” of obedience. He was commanded to offer up his son of promise, Isaac. When, in obedience, he took a knife in hand to slay his son as commanded by Jehovah, God’s angel told him to withhold his hand in slaying his son. Jehovah now knew Abraham feared God. Abraham “in obedience” in Genesis 22 once again fulfilled Genesis 15:6. Abraham “*believed in Jehovah; and He*

reckoned it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Abraham is called the “friend of God” due to his works of obedience (James 2:23).

Works of obedience and obedience of faith harmonize in Gospel justification. Paul opens and closes his epistle to the Romans with “obedience of faith” as the goal of Paul’s apostleship and Scripture (Romans 1:5, 16:26). James’ “works” of obedience makes “faith” effectual unto salvation. Without it, faith is “barren” or non-effectual (James 2:14, 20).

Faith works, or it is dead and ineffectual. James combines Abraham’s faith and works, illustrating their interaction: “*faith wrought with his works and by works was faith made perfect*” (James 2:22). Bastian Kruihof takes us to the beneficial vegetable garden where faith and works come together to the ultimate glory of God. “*Leaning on your hoe handle you may catch the vision of the future. And standing over your filled baskets how can you help dropping to your knees and exclaiming, 'How good the Lord is?'*” (The Lively Pilgrim, The Story of Kleine Klaus; p. 62, 1950). Faith and works of obedience work to the glory of God!