

Faith and Works

Part 1

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:01] Perhaps we could turn to the epistle of James for a moment. James chapter 2, verse 14.

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and hath not works?

Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, and be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? [00:01:01] Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Yes, a man may say thou hast faith and I have works. Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well, the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abram believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? [00:02:01] For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. So far the word of scripture tonight. Today we have been occupied with the epistle of the Galatians, and we have seen that there is no way to come to God to be justified by the works of the law, but that the only way is to put our faith into the Lord Jesus, and we are justified by faith alone. And Abraham was before us as an example that exemplifies this principle.

When we now turn to the epistle of James, for somebody who is reading this for the first time, there might be a contradiction. You might think, well James is just saying the opposite. He says that man is not justified by faith alone, but by works, and he is giving Abraham as an example as well.

[00:03:05] Today it was mentioned that the epistle to the Galatians was an epistle which was particularly relevant to the reformers, Martin Luther.

And so we can well understand that Martin Luther had his problems with the epistle of James, which he should have called, you never know what he really said, but it is said that Martin Luther said this

epistle was the epistle of straw. And I once read that William Kelly said, in obviously turning to this saying of Martin Luther, that he would say it was an epistle of iron, the sledgehammer of God, which is very practical in its application.

But to solve this problem which we might have when turning to James, we must simply see that these two authors are seeing the same thing from a different point of view. Obviously there are no contradictions in Scripture, we know this, [00:04:02] but we must see the different point of view they have. To put it quite generally, Paul is always speaking principally, and James is always speaking practically. This is the main difference. You will find other examples of their different point of view in this epistle of James. For example, James says that the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. You may wonder how man can work something for the righteousness of God at all, but Paul speaks about the righteousness of God in a principal way, and we only get this through faith. But James says that the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God in a practical way, in our practical lives. Obviously the wrath of a man does not work the righteousness of God. Another point I would mention is that James says that lust begets sin, [00:05:02] while Paul, in Romans 7, says just the opposite. Sin begets the lust.

We might wonder who is right. Well, of course, both of them are right. Paul again is speaking principally, and when Paul speaks about sin, what he means is the sin that is indwelling me, in me, and this begets the lust to do something that is not right. But James is speaking practically, and when he speaks about sin, he means the act of sin. And he says there is lust, I desire to do it, and then I do it, and then I practice this sin. And when we come to this passage we have read about the justification, we will see also that they are using the same words, but speaking about different things. First of all, when Paul speaks about works in Galatians and Romans, we have seen he is speaking about works of the law. And he says works of the law are absolutely impossible.

[00:06:01] On the way of works of the law, no man will be justified. When James speaks about works, he is not speaking about works of law, but about works of faith. And when they both speak about justification, Paul is speaking about justification before God.

And faith alone is the way to be justified before God.

To put your faith, your trust, your confidence in the word of God, and then you will be justified before God. But James is speaking about justification before men, which is quite different. He says in the passage we have read, a man may say, he speaks about confession.

There is somebody who says something, he says I have faith. Well, says James, show me your faith, not God, me.

How can I know that there is faith in the heart of somebody who says, well I am a believer, I have faith. [00:07:02] Well, James says, show me your faith by your works, such works of faith.

He says, what does it profit my brethren though a man may say he has faith, have not works. And then he gives an example of a brother or sister who is in need of something, and one says, depart in peace, be you warmed and filled, but he doesn't give him what he needs. So his works, his acting is in contradiction to what he says, to his confession.

And he says, well, if faith has not works, it's in vain.

It doesn't use anything to say I am a believer in front of man, they will not see that. I must show it by my works.

One says thou has faith and I have works, so there may be somebody who makes a contradiction that doesn't exist. He says, one says I have faith and the other I have works, he says no, that's not the way. Show me, he says, show me thy faith without thy works, which is impossible, he cannot do it. [00:08:07] How can I show my faith to somebody, to other men, without works of faith? And I will show thee my faith by my works, because that is the way to show faith before men, and to be justified in the eyes of men, that we do such works of faith. It is not enough to have an orthodox confession of faith.

Somebody might say, thou believest that there is one God.

Oh, says Paul, that's right and well, the devils do the same, they believe and tremble. Only to have an orthodox confession of faith that there is one God, that is not the saving faith. And so there must be works of faith to show before men the faith that is in my heart.

[00:09:04] So we see, when on the one hand we have meditated today on the fact that we are justified by faith and not by the works of law. Now this problem that had come up among the Galatians to go back to fulfilling the law, and he had shown them it was absolutely impossible. The only thing it brought upon them was a curse. The blessing only came through faith.

But James now shows us the other side and says this same faith, the living faith in your heart, which God sees, must be shown before men to justify you in the sight of men by such works of faith. And James says, but wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

If somebody on James calls him a vain man, he's always very strong in his language. That this is so, that the confession of faith is of no use if there are not the works of faith. [00:10:07] And then he gives the same example that Paul gave Abraham.

But there's a difference, which I may point out.

Before I do this, I would like to make another distinction clear. People in Christianity very often speak about good works.

And that's not what James is talking about. When James speaks about works that testify to my faith, it has to be works of faith.

Works that make clear that the motive, the energy for my activity is faith. This is not necessarily the case with so-called good works. If I were rich, I might fill out a check of a great amount of money and give it to some charity.

[00:11:02] Does that prove my faith?

Well, not in the least.

I might have a lot of motives for doing so. Among the first Christians were some who thought, well, we would like to have the same honor as this Barnabas, so we might give something. Well, they

didn't give all, but they pretended, Ananias and Sapphira, to have given all. The motive for their activity was not faith. It may be that I want to have a good name or something. Good works, doing good things to people, is not necessarily something that proves my faith. And the examples that James mentions in this chapter are just the opposite of what people normally would consider good works. He gives the example of Abraham, who murdered his son, so to say, in the eyes of people. And he gives the example of Rahab the harlot, who worked together with the enemy of her country. All this is not considered a good work by people in general. [00:12:02] But it gave proof of the faith of Abraham. It proved his love to God. And in Rahab, it proved her love for the people of God. Two things you always find. If there's real faith, the love for God and the love for the people of God will be shown. And if we take a look at Abraham and what he did, it says, Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered up Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

He takes this example of Abraham offering up his son Isaac, which he did by faith.

Because Abraham, when he did this, he reckoned that God could give him back the son from the dead.

He had the promise of God that he would be blessed in this son.

[00:13:02] And so he said, well, if God wants me to offer him up, he must bring him back again. Something which had never happened before. Later in the Old Testament, we find examples that dead were raised, but not before Abraham. He had never seen such a thing, but he believed it. He said, Isaac is the seed of promise, and so if I have to offer him up, God will give him back to me. And scripture says that he received him back in picture, so to say. That's what he did. And therefore, it showed his faith. And James said, the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness. He quotes more or less the same thing that Paul did for his argumentation.

When did God, when did he believe God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness? We know that this was in Genesis 15.

[00:14:02] And God saw his face and he was justified in the eyes of God at that moment.

But James says in Genesis 22, a time later, this scripture was fulfilled because now all men could see the face in Abraham, which God had seen just from the beginning when he believed him. God saw the faith in the heart of Abraham and he was justified in the eyes of God. A time later, when in Genesis 22, Abram went up to the Mount Moriah to offer up his son Isaac. There he says the scripture was fulfilled. There also men saw the face that worked in Abraham, and so he was justified by works in the eyes of men.

And in Rahab, we have the same.

Rahab speaks about the fact that the children of her country, they were in fear of Israel, but she alone was the one who said, I know that God has given you the land. There was faith in her that God had given this land to them [00:15:03] and she puts her faith in this God of Israel.

And so through this act that she did, when she received the messengers, her faith could be seen and

she was rescued from judgment.

So, the only thing I wanted to point out is that scripture shows us both sides. The one is to be justified in the eyes of God, what we are talking about in Galatians, and there is no way of doing this by works of law, but only by faith in the Lord Jesus and in his word.

But as far as men are concerned, in the eyes of men, we are justified by works of faith. They must see through our behavior, through the way we act, that there is real faith in us, and then we will be justified in the eyes of men. And this wonderful person, Abraham, is the man who exemplifies both to us. God spoke to him, he believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness in the eyes of God. [00:16:04] And later, when he acted on God's word, everybody could see the faith of Abraham. When he went up to Mount Moriah with Isaac, everyone could see, here is a man who believes God and who reckons that God will give him back his son, if necessary, out of the dead, because this was what he promised and Abraham believed God.