



Blackfoot Church of Christ

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Faith and Works

By Sean Cavender

After writing an article for GROW magazine last year on the text in Romans 4 and Paul's argument of justification by grace through faith, it seemed appropriate to address the nature of biblical faith from another important text in the New Testament—James 2. Romans 4 defends salvation by faith, not by works of the Law of Moses, and appeals to Abraham's faith as our example. James is concerned with the general nature of faith.

Faith Saves

James 2:14-26 begins a critical section in the book of James where the author poses a situation regarding the nature of faith. He asks what use faith is if it does not have works (Jam 2:14). James asks, "can that faith save him?" James is concerned with the nature of faith relative to salvation; will faith that does not work save a person? James 2 is centered around the nature of the faith that saves—saving faith. He discusses righteousness and justification by faith by appealing to Abraham and Rahab (Jam 2:23-25). This passage is a defense of saving faith. We must have the kind of faith discussed in the passage if we want to be saved.

You may be wondering: is this faith the initial faith that we must have in obedience to the gospel? Is James writing about the faith I must have that is demonstrated in repentance, confession, and baptism? The answer is yes. We must believe in God to be saved (Acts 16:31). We are baptized to be saved from our sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). Those who obey the gospel in repentance and baptism are called believers (Acts 16:33-34). The Philippian jailer (Acts 16) was not identified as a believer until after he was baptized! His faith, and the faith James admonishes us to have, is an obedient faith. We must obey God's commands to be forgiven of our sins.

James 2 is not just about our initial faith and obedience to the gospel. James is presenting a holistic view of faith—initial faith in obedience to the gospel and the life of faith that Christians are called to continue to have. Our faithful service as a Christian is just as impactful on our eternal salvation as is whether we've been baptized or not.

Faith Works

A unique element to James's writing is his ability to conjure up vivid and powerful illustrations. In James 2:15-16, he envisions a situation where a person in need of food and clothing comes to a believer and the believer says "go in peace, be warmed and be filled" (Jam 2:16), but does nothing to help the person in need. He pointedly says, "what use is that?" The obvious conclusion is that a believer who does not accompany his faith with action in harmony with what he says will not be saved. "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (Jam 2:17). This becomes the refrain, repeated throughout the discussion of saving faith. Faith without works is dead; faith alone does not save; a person is justified by works with their faith (Jam 2:17, 20, 24, 26).

So, James identifies important elements of genuine faith:

1. Faith is not merely profession, but involves action
2. Faith is not hypocritical, merely acknowledging God, but seeks to do God's will (Jam 2:19)
3. Faith is not shallow and judgmental because it does not hold personal favoritism (Jam 2:1-4)
4. Faith is not merely an appearance or act; it is genuine and sincere in its devotion (Jam 2:15-16)
5. Faith is not simply hearing, but it is doing (Jam 1:22)

Due to the influence of Calvinistic teaching and the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, many Bible students have a misunderstanding of the role of "works." James 2 poses many issues for the doctrine of salvation by faith alone—since James's point is that faith without works is a dead faith and avails nothing! Yet, people appeal to Paul, who says, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God," (Rom 4:2). They argue Paul says a person is justified by faith only, and not by works. If that is true, there is a serious inconsistency in the word of God.

Paul does argue that Abraham was justified by faith, not by works. He wrote, "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due," (Rom 4:3-4). Abraham was not justified by works—but what kind of works is Paul discussing in the context of Romans 4? Paul anticipates the Judaizing teachers who were requiring Gentiles to keep circumcision and the law of Moses to be saved. The "works" Paul said Abraham was not justified by were the works of the law. Paul said in Romans 3:20, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight..." Later in Romans 3, he asked "where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith" (Romans 3:27). Boasting is excluded in the law of faith, but in a system of works boasting is accepted because it is earned and deserved—it is "due" to the person who may be boastful (Rom 4:4). In the context of Romans 4, Paul is clearly identifying that a person is not justified by works of the law of Moses. He does not teach that obedience to the "law

of faith” is unnecessary (Rom 3:27). In fact, Paul shows that Abraham believed God and walked by faith. He writes that we must walk in the steps of Abraham if we want to model the faith he had (Rom 4:12).

While there may be some difficulty in studying Romans 4, we must honestly study and realize there is no contradiction between Romans 4 and James 2. Paul was not advocating a doctrine of salvation by faith alone apart from obedience to the commands of God. In fact, he was writing about the gospel and how it requires the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26).

Many think “works” is simply defined as something you do, something earned, deserved, and something to boast about. Some may boast because of their works. Paul says salvation is by grace through faith, not by works to be boasted of (Eph 2:8-9). Works of merit cannot earn God’s grace and favor and are not in harmony with the gospel of Christ. James 2 does not encourage boasting and glorying in one’s works.

James appeals to Abraham’s work of offering up Isaac upon the altar (Jam 2:21-23). Abraham’s works were the evidence of a faith that completely trusted in God’s ability, power, and strength to accomplish His will. The Genesis account clearly shows that Abraham was blessed because of his obedience. “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice,” (Gen 22:18) Obedience is the way to receive God’s blessing. God blessed faithful Abraham because of his obedience. In James 2:14-26, when James argues we are justified by faith and works, he is not supposing we have something to boast about. He is not contradicting the apostle Paul. He is proving that faith obeys God! James says that faith without works is dead (Jam 2:17, 26). A faith that does not obey will not save and will prevent someone from being justified. Abraham’s faith and works perfected him; he was made righteous. James is not forging his own gospel; he is defining true, biblical faith, which works and humbly submits to the commands of God. Faith will obey out of a genuine and sincere heart. Faith proves itself in loving obedience. The Lord Jesus said if we love Him, then we will keep His commandments (Jn 14:15). As a result of works, faith is perfected and completed (Jam 2:22). Yet, it is possible for faith to remain incomplete and unsatisfactory to God. An incomplete faith is hypocritical, a mere profession of good works without anything to vindicate it.

The Friend of God

As a result of Abraham’s faith, he was called the friend of God. We, too, can become God’s friend if we will prove our faith by our loving obedience and good works. Jesus said, “You are My friends if you do what I command you,” (Jn 15:14). If you have been deceived by the false teachings of salvation by faith alone, study the Scripture and seek a faith that obeys God. Be “obedient to the faith” as the early disciples were (Acts 6:7) and come to the Lord, submitting to God’s commands. Allow your faith to work and act, then you will receive the greatest blessing from God you could ever be given—being His friend.

Prayer Requests & Announcements

- Dave and Catherine are traveling and plan to return home this week
- Shirley Torres, Seattle WA (Torres' have visited our congregation) is fighting cancer. Chemo treatments have not been successful. They have decided to stop the Chemo and pursue other treatments to help enhance her quality of life.
- Keep April in your prayers as she deals with health issues
- The Christians in the Philippines.
- Bible class tomorrow night 7:00pm at Chad and Kass' on evangelism

For prayer requests, call or text

Chad @ (208) 221-2587 or Ross @ (208) 680-6590

Assignments

<u>Today</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Tom Mitchell Lord's Table – Chad Mitchell Sermon – Ross Ward	<u>Wednesday</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Tom Mitchell Invitation – Ross Ward
<u>Next Sunday</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Chad Mitchell Lord's Table – David Porter Sermon – Ross Ward	<u>Next Wednesday</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Kyle Callahan Invitation – Ross Ward

Blackfoot Church of Christ
370 North Shilling Ave.
Blackfoot, Idaho 83221

Meeting Times:

Sunday Morning Classes 10:00AM
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00AM
Wednesday Evening 7:30PM



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