



# Blackfoot Church of Christ

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## Show Me Your Faith

By William Stewart

The doctrine of salvation by faith alone is exceptionally common in today's religious world. One modern day proponent of the doctrine has admitted James 2:14-26 "...definitely seems to cause serious problems for the 'salvation by faith alone' concept." Undeterred, he tries to explain away James 2 by redefining the word "justified," citing marginal translations, and then falsely claiming, "...any verse that ascribes salvation to faith/belief, with no other requirement mentioned, is a declaration that salvation is by faith alone."<sup>1</sup> Two things to note: 1) the only way this works is for the Bible student to ignore every verse ascribing salvation to something other than faith; but wait, 2) the writer just acknowledged in his statement that there are verses which ascribe salvation to faith but also mention other requirements. The sad fact is, many today simply do not believe what James wrote.

But salvation by faith alone is not a new doctrine. There was a great focus on this teaching in the days of the protestant reformation, as evidenced by the writing of John Calvin, Martin Luther, and others. Commenting on Galatians 3:6, Luther wrote, "Do you now see how faith justifies without works? Sin lingers in us, and God hates sin. A transfusion of righteousness, therefore, becomes vitally necessary. This transfusion of righteousness we obtain from Christ because we believe in Him."<sup>2</sup> Luther's position contradicts James 2, so it is no surprise he calls into question the canonicity of the book. In his preface to the New Testament, Luther said James "...is really an epistle of straw compared to the others; for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel in it."<sup>3</sup> In his preface to the book of James he belittles the inspired writer (and by extension the Spirit of

God), saying, "...he wished to guard against those who depended on faith without going on to works, but he had neither the spirit nor the thought nor the eloquence equal to the task." Worse still, Luther claims James had done "...violence to the Scripture, and so contradicts Paul and all Scripture," and concludes, "I therefore refuse him a place among the writers of the true canon of my bible..."<sup>4</sup> The true conflict is not between James and Paul, but between James and Martin Luther. Luther did not believe what James wrote, therefore he rejected James.

The battle against this false doctrine stretches back to the apostolic age. That is why a text like James 2:14-26 exists. James provided a defense against the falsehood of salvation by faith alone. In verse 14, the writer inquires, "...if someone says he has faith but does not have works..." is his faith (alone) sufficient to save him? James affirms not once, not twice, but three times, "...faith without works is dead..." (v 17, 20, 26). He gives examples of those who have faith but no works (the demons, v 19), and conversely, those who are "justified by works" (Abraham and Rahab, v 21-25). He makes great affirmations, such as "...faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect," and "a man is justified by works and not by faith only" (v 22, 24).

Despite all the antagonism and contempt James has endured through the ages, his teaching is no different from that of Jesus or the apostles. None of them taught salvation by faith alone. All the Bible writers taught the necessity of obedience to God. Jesus said one cannot enter heaven unless he "...does the will of My Father in heaven..." (Matthew 7:21). Paul said flaming fire awaits "...those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Peter also differentiates between "those who do not obey the gospel of God" and "...the righteous one who is scarcely saved..." (1 Peter 4:17-18). The Hebrew writer referred to Jesus as "...the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him..." (Hebrews 5:9). John said if we do not keep God's commandments, we are "...a liar, and the truth is not in..." us (1 John 2:4).

In James 2:18, a hypothetical dissident is introduced, a first-century advocate of the faith alone position. The "someone" of James 2:17 is the same "someone" who "...has faith but not works..." (James 2:14), and the "one" who says, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but does nothing to help the naked and destitute brother or sister (James 2:16). In verse 18, this opponent states, "You have faith, and I have works." As it reads, it seems odd. James has been

contending for the necessity of works, so why would his challenger seemingly say James has faith and he (the opponent) has works? The pronouns in the text are likely intended to be generic. Essentially the assailant says, "Come on, James. Some people have faith, some people have works. What's the big deal?" In his response, James calls upon the faith only subscriber to demonstrate his faith. How do you show your faith when it is alone? You can claim it and declare it, but there is no evidence by which to validate it. An unadorned profession of faith may gather the endorsement of like-minded adherents, but the fact remains, "...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead..." (James 2:17).

In the final clause of James 2:18, the writer affirms, "...I will show you my faith by my works." Faith must be more than an academic exercise. The demons believe, but their faith does nothing to save them (James 2:19). Faith must be displayed; it must be demonstrated; it must be shown. Faith involves active obedience to the word of God. The patriarch Abraham was not justified simply because he believed God's promises; he was justified because he acted upon God's promises. He offered Isaac (James 2:21). Works and faith are not independent of one another. Faith works together with works, "...and by works faith was made perfect..." (James 2:22). Faith is consummated in works.

It seems the unwillingness on the part of the faith alone supporters to allow works is driven by a misguided notion that we (and James) are saying we are saved by works. James clearly affirmed that faith by itself cannot save, but his message is not salvation by works. The apostle Paul on more than one occasion renounced the idea of salvation by meritorious works (Romans 9:11; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5). James does not contradict Paul; nowhere does he exalt works as the means of salvation. He acknowledged works as evidence of salvation. His point is not we are saved by works, but we are lost without them. He affirmed, "...as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). The simplest way to distinguish a dead body from a living body is movement. Dead bodies do not move. The body without the spirit is dead - it does nothing. Likewise, faith without works is dead - it does nothing.

"Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

## Prayer Requests & Announcements

- Porters are traveling overseas
- Sylvia Ward, Ross's Mom, remains in rehab
- Cameron Bauman brain tumor and radiation treatments
- Scott Boucher (Sparks NV) cancer treatment
- Keep April in your prayers as she deals with health issues
- The Christians in the Philippines
- Worship Assignments for the month of September are posted on the bulletin board

**For prayer requests, call or text**

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

## Worship Assignments

### Today

**Song Leader** – Tom Mitchell

**Lord's Table** – Chad Mitchell  
– Larry Thompson

### Wednesday

**Song Leader** – Ross Ward

**Invitation** – Tom Mitchell

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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