

“Faith without Works”
James 2:14-26

This passage has been the source of much controversy. Martin Luther, the man behind much of the Protestant Reformation, stated James should not be included in the canon of Scripture because he contradicted the apostle Paul’s teaching. Paul clearly taught that one is justified (saved, made righteous) not by works of the Law but by faith alone through Christ alone (Rom. 3:20, 4:1-25; Gal. 3:1-11; Eph. 2:8-9). All Scripture must be in harmony as God the Holy Spirit is its’ author (2Tim. 3:16). A careful reading and understanding in context will show there is no contradiction between the teachings of James and Paul.

The context of James’ teaching on justification is found in verses seventeen and eighteen of chapter one. He strongly asserts that salvation is a gracious gift from God as every good and perfect gift comes from the Father (John 3:16) and only by His will are we brought forth (John 1:13, 3:5-8; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:3-9). James states that the one who *says* he has faith but does not have works, that *type* of faith is not true saving faith. It is a mere profession, as Jesus taught (Matt. 7:21-23). James is viewing this subject from the stand-point of a man *after* his conversion, not before it. Paul emphasizes justification from God’s viewpoint before conversion. Yet he agrees good works follow salvation (Matt. 5:16; Eph. 2:10).

James illustrates faith without works by an example of those in physical need. *Words* of compassion like “depart in peace, be warmed and filled” need to be backed by *acts* of compassion in giving of that which is needful (1John 3:17-18). A further illustration that faith without works is dead is the demons. They are orthodox in their belief in God (Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:24; Luke 4:41; Acts 19:15) but have no fruit (Gal. 5:22).

The conclusion to James’ argument about works involves Abraham and Rahab. Both were justified by works, James states, but again a careful reading clearly shows that James is demonstrating the result of justification, good works. He quotes Genesis 15:6 which forcefully claims Abraham was credited with righteousness solely on his faith. He *believed* many years before Isaac was ever born or offered as a sacrifice. His obedience and that of Rahab demonstrate their faith was genuine. Good works follow justification (Rom. 5:1) because believers are new creatures (2Cor. 5:17).