

The Unity of James and Paul on Justification

To Possess Faith is to Live Faithful

This pamphlet represents an appendix to the study of justification by faith alone which was a part of a Wednesday night study at Liberty Christian Church on the five solae, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture and glory to God alone.

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The Unity of James and Paul on Justification To Possess Faith is to Live Faithful

Citing James 2:24 where James wrote, “*You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*” and Romans 3:28 where Paul wrote, “*For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.*” some have incorrectly asserted that James and Paul contradicted each other’s teaching on justification. However, this is not the case. The following brief examination of the context of James’ statement reveals he was addressing different circumstances than that of Paul. Therefore, his use of the word *justified* is in a different sense than that of Paul’s.

James builds a case against empty profession upon the biblical truth that genuine faith and obedience to the law of God cannot be separated. In essence real faith will result in good works. His point is not that works save but that authentic faith which saves (2:23) yields good works. Thus, good works justify before men the one who professes to have faith.

James was dealing with an early form Antinomianism. *Antinomian* comes from a combination of the Greek terms *anti*, meaning *against* and *nomos*, meaning *law*. Although the term does not appear in the New Testament it is used to designate those who were/are against the moral law of God. Generally, antinomianism applies to those who believe God’s moral laws are not necessary in the Christian life. Various forms of antinomianism exist, some denying the law because believers are under grace, others denying the law because believers are led internally by the Spirit not needing, as they say, an external entity such as the law to lead them, others deny the law because as they believe, it is somehow negated by love, and still others deny the law because Christ has fulfilled its demands, etc... Nevertheless, they all basically deny the direct relevance of God’s moral laws to the believer as being a rule of life. This should not be taken to mean that all forms of antinomianism result in licentious living. While some do, others do not. On the other hand, the Bible nowhere teaches that true

justification before God negates the responsibility of the believer to live obediently in the light of God's law.

The antinomians of James' day professed faith but denied the need for works of obedience in accord with God's law. In the second chapter verses 14-26 James confronts his antinomian contenders head-on. The confrontation can be understood in the context of four points:

1. The Condition/Contention

The condition provides a description of the circumstance James addressed.

2. The Challenge

The challenge is for the mere professor to produce evidence of the presence of his faith beyond his mere profession. Without works this is something he cannot do. Therefore, his argument that he has genuine faith cannot be substantiated.

3. The Characteristic of Genuine Faith

James uses two historical figures, Abraham, the father of the Jews and Rahab, a Gentile woman as evidence that genuine faith reveals its presence by works.

4. The Conclusion

Biblical faith, which is genuine faith, works and faith apart from works, which is merely a profession of faith is a dead faith.

1. The Condition/Contention: (James 2:14, 19)

Empty Profession “... *if a man says he has faith, but he has no works...*”

In chapter one James taught that a person is brought forth (brought into being with reference to salvation) as a result of the will of God by the word of His truth (v. 18). It stands to reason that since Christians are born by the truth they would be doers of that truth. Therefore, having been brought forth by the word of truth James called his audience to be doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves (v. 22). In verse 25 James referred to the word of God as the law of liberty and specifically indicated

that the one who abides in this law of liberty is blessed in what he does. Furthermore, in verses 26- 27 James even described certain actions associated with being a doer of the Word. Then in chapter 2 he pointed out that holding faith in the Lord Jesus with personal favoritism is a sin because it is a violation of God's law. He specifically referenced the summation of the second table of the law with the quote, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" And pointed out that violation of this command is a violation of the whole law (2:1, 8-13). Thus, he drew a direct connection between biblical faith mentioned in 2:1 and obedience to the law of God in verses 8-10.

But there were objectors to obedience to the word. In 2:14 and 19 James revealed that condition as those who professed to have genuine faith without works or in other words, those who professed to have a saving faith without accompanying works of obedience.

"What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" James 2:14 NAS

"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." James 2:19 NAS

2. The Challenge: (James 2:18)

The evidence of faith "...show me..."

"But someone may well say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'" James 2:18 NAS

In James 2:18 the professor of faith is challenged to justify the authenticity of his professed faith without works. This challenge is in itself an indictment against empty profession. For apart from some kind of action it is impossible to demonstrate to men justifiable evidence of that which is claimed to exist in the heart/mind. The challenge demonstrates the foolishness of professing faith without living faithful; the foolishness of professing to men the possession of faith in God without living faithful to God's Word before them (2:20).

Note the repetition in 2:18 on *showing* faith. James' point is that faith which exists in the heart must be shown or demonstrated to men by works. Specifically, works in accord with God's law. Such works demonstrate or in another word, **justify** the professor before men who look at the outward appearance not the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

3. The Characteristic of Genuine Faith: (James 2:21-25) **Biblical examples of faith at work**

To prove his point that works justify the presence of faith before men who look at the outward appearance not the heart James cites two biblical examples of those who possessed genuine faith, Abraham and Rahab. The evidence that they possessed real faith was their works. Thus, they showed their faith by their works and consequently both were justified or shown to be righteous before men.

In the case of Abraham, James cited in 2:21-22 the event of Genesis 22 where Abraham, out of obedience to God's command, offered up Isaac on the altar. Consequently, Abraham showed his faith by his works. It was a faith he had possessed for many years as James indicated in 2:23 by quoting Genesis 15:6 which refers to an earlier time.

Furthermore, after calling Abraham's obedience to God's command a fulfillment of the genuine faith which existed in Abraham (2:21-23), James wrote, "***You see, that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.***" (2:24). Abraham's work of obedience justified him in the sight of men in the sense of demonstrating or *showing* to them he possessed real faith.

In the case of Rahab (Jm, 2:25), the faith she professed (Josh. 2:9-13) was evident first to the spies and then to the world through her deeds. In the same manner then Rahab was justified before others by her works not by faith alone.

4. The Conclusion: (James 2:17, 20, 26)

Faith without works is dead and useless

A faith without works is nothing more than empty profession. It is neither genuine nor justifiable before men. It is dead and useless. James taught that works of obedience neither save nor maintain salvation but that they do demonstrate that a person who professes genuine faith is saved. Therefore, according to James 2:14, a professed faith which does not demonstrate its presence by works which are in accord with God's truth such a faith is not a saving faith.

James' and Paul's use of the word Justification

Whereas, according to James, works justify the presence of faith before men who look on the outside (Jm. 2:18 and 24), God need not see the works to know whether or not one possesses genuine faith since He looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Therefore, according to Paul, God justifies a man by faith apart from works of the Law (Rm. 3:28). This does not mean God does not expect good works in accord with His Word. He does, for the one who possesses genuine faith is God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God beforehand ordained so the person of genuine faith would walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10). The fact regarding Abraham, is God knew Abraham believed by faith, therefore God declared him righteous (Gn. 15:6) and years later by His command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, God demonstrated Abraham's faith to the world through his obedience (Gn. 22:1-12; Jm. 2:18-24).

Both James and Paul quote Genesis 15:6 but for the purpose of addressing different conditions. James used the reference with respect to confronting antinomians who professed to have faith apart from works. Whereas, Paul used the reference with respect to confronting legalists who professed that salvation was by the works of the Law.

Therefore, James in 2:23 contending against antinomians quoted Genesis 15:6 to teach that the genuine faith Abraham possessed

was instrumental to Abraham's works. By this James demonstrated that genuine faith is accompanied by good works. Therefore, when in James 2:24 James wrote, "*You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone*" he used the word *justified* in the sense of justifying before men the presence of faith.

Paul, on the other hand, contending against legalists quoted Genesis 15:6 (Rm. 4:3) to teach that genuine faith possessed by Abraham was instrumental to Abraham's justification. By this Paul demonstrated that genuine faith is the instrumental means of justification. Therefore, when Paul in Romans 3:28 wrote, "*For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law*" he used the word *justified* in the sense of being declared righteous by God.

As noted by Wayne Grudem in his Systematic Theology (Pg. 723 and 731), James used the word *justify* in the same sense of its use in Luke 16:15 where the Lord spoke of the Pharisees as those who *justify* themselves in the site of men. In their case they were attempting to *show* themselves righteous in the sight of men. So James uses *justified* with the sense of meaning to *demonstrate* or *show*. But Paul uses the word in the sense of its use in Luke 7:29 where God is justified. That is, as indicated in the ESV, the people declared God just. So Paul uses justified with the sense of meaning *declare* or *crediting*. It is the same word used in two different senses in the context of two different conditions.

James agrees with Paul that justification is by faith in that he quotes Genesis 15:6 and in doing so clearly says Abraham's belief was reckoned to him as righteousness. In 1:18 he also indicates that it was through God's will one is brought forth as opposed to one's work. Paul also agrees with James that good works accompany genuine faith as he states, the believer is God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God prepared beforehand so that the person of faith should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).