

Does Paul Contradict James?

Martin Luther called the epistle of James an “epistle of straw” while defending his doctrine of faith only. He was baffled at the fact that Paul said we are justified by faith and not by works (Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9), and James said that we are justified by works and not by faith only (James 2:24). His conclusion was that James was wrong since there are many Pauline epistles and only one epistle of James. We will now examine the error of Martin Luther and confirm that there is no contradiction between Paul and James.

The error lies within the fact that Martin Luther thought that Paul and James were discussing the same kind of works. However, Paul writes about the works of the Old Law while James speaks of works in a general sense. One of many places where Paul speaks of being justified by faith is in Romans 4:5. It says, *“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”* We find that Paul said earlier in chapter 3:28, *“We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”* Paul is clearly talking about works of the Old Law and not works in general. Paul also speaks of works of the Law in Ephesians 2:8-9: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* His point is that if a man was saved by works of the Law, he would have something to “boast” about, seeing that he would have kept it perfectly. Except, no one can keep the Law perfectly therefore no one can be saved by its works.

Since Paul was not speaking of works in general, none can conclude that works in general do not save us. Jesus even called faith a work (John 6:29). Works do save us and James is correct! It is very interesting that both Paul and James use the example of Abraham to prove their two separate points (Romans 4:1-5; James 2:21-24). This just goes to show us that Abraham, like us, was righteous because of faith plus his works! He worked by offering his son on the altar having faith that God would raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). Many teach and will continue to teach that one is saved by faith only, but we must confront them, expose this false doctrine, and teach the truth to save lost souls before it is too late!

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