

Faith And Works

Introduction. If there is any doctrine that the enemy of man and God desires to distort, it is the doctrine of salvation. If Satan can cause confusion and error in regard to that doctrine, he has succeeded in keeping men in their sin and under divine judgment and condemnation, which the unredeemed will one day share with Satan and his angels in the eternal torment of hell.

The consistency of God's message is the ultimate proof of the inspiration of the scriptures. God does not give contradictory commands (1 Corinthians 14:33, 37). He does not give one set of instructions to one church and another set to another church. Therefore, it is surprising that many pit one passage against another in an attempt to resolve the conflict. Martin Luther could not resolve James 2 with his belief, so he expressed doubt that James was inspired.

But throwing out portions of the Bible does solve the problem. Often, apparent conflicts can be resolved if the terms are understood in the context in which they are used. To clear up one of the most pervasive false doctrines in the religious world, we will focus on the relation of faith and works in Romans.

I. ***The Theme Of Romans***

- A. Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). It is through Jesus that we have received grace and it was Paul's duty to bring about the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:25-27).
- B. Paul defines the scope of the letter in Romans 1:16-17. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to every believer, both Jew and Gentile, because in it the righteousness of God is revealed.

II. ***The Gentiles' Need For Salvation***

- A. The Gentiles should have known God through His creation (Romans 1:18-23). It was their willful ignorance that led them further and further from God. They prove that mankind on their own cannot be saved.
- B. To better understand his argument, we should look at Greco-Roman society in Paul's day.
 - 1. These two societies were well known for their idolatry and their immorality, but their religion consisted of works alone.
 - 2. Someone once stated, "You can believe that Zeus is a complete idiot, but as long as you provide the requisite sacrifices, you can secure his good favor."

3. Hellenistic religion, which influenced cultural practice, allowed you to do as you pleased so long as no significant social harm was done, and even then you could have any harm excused by the application of the appropriate sacrifices.
- C. Thus, Paul was addressing people who thought religion involved doing the proper sacrifices at the proper times to secure the good will of the gods. Harold Mattingly (*The Man in the Roman Street*) wrote, "When fully realized, the gods were persons and, as the only real persons in our experience are human, they were therefore represented in human form. They had their own houses (temples) and images (idols) that attested their presence there. They demanded the customary dues of worship, the ritual words and acts, the prayer and the vow, the sacrifice, bloody or unbloody, the garland, the procession. Just as devout service might earn prosperity and victory, so neglect might bring down divine wrath and, with it, disaster and defeat."

III. ***Fairness In Judgment***

- A. The Jewish mind set allowed them to condemn the Gentiles while simultaneously committing similar sins (Romans 2:1-4).
- B. God's judgment will be fairly based on what a person does (Romans 2:5-8). Obedience is what makes the difference.
- C. God's judgments are impartial (Romans 2:9-11).
 1. The Gentiles did not like the Jews who insisted there was only one God. The Jews did not like the Gentiles, taking pride in their superiority as God's chosen people.
 2. Paul throws hundreds of years of ethnic bias out the window by declaring that God does not care about your nationality; it matters what you do.
- D. How can God fairly judge people who had not received the law (Romans 2:12-16)?
 1. Judgment will be based on action, not just possession of (or hearing) the law.
 2. The Gentiles did have a system of morality.
 - a) The Gentiles learned the tenants of the law of Moses at some point in the past and continued to live by them.
 - b) The work of the law, and not the law itself, was written on the heart. Their conscience would accuse them when they failed to live up to their standard of right, and approve them when they did right as they saw it.

IV. *The Jews' Need For Salvation*

- A. The Jews were arrogant in their belief (Romans 2:17-24). They knew the law, yet they violated it -- they heard, but they did not do (Matthew 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29).
- B. Circumcision was the physical evidence of being in covenant relationship with God, but it meant nothing when that covenant was not obeyed (Romans 2:25-29).
 - 1. Paul spiritualizes the rite of circumcision. It is not the physical act that saves, but the dedication displayed.
 - 2. A circumcised Jew will be treated like the uncircumcised Gentile if he does not keep God's law, and the uncircumcised Gentile will be treated as the circumcised Jew if he does keep God's law.
 - 3. Christians are the "Israel" of today (Galatians 6:16), and we are under obligation to be obedient (Matthew 25:21).
- C. A historical background of the Jews.
 - 1. God gave them their land and He was their God. For most of their history God's temple existed in Jerusalem, where He was worshipped.
 - 2. The Jews believed in their sanctification, being a people set apart and different from the rest of the world. They kept themselves separate from the unclean Gentiles so as not to be contaminated. They believed that their salvation was an entitlement due them for the ethnic and religious heritage. Their personal behavior was not seen as a major factor (Isaiah 29:13).
- D. Did being a Jew give anyone an advantage (Romans 3:1-8)?
 - 1. The Jews did have the advantage of having God's law, but having the law meant they were held to a higher standard.
 - 2. If God is glorified even when someone sins, why is the sinner condemned? Because it is just. Should the Jews have then ignored the law? No!
- E. The law itself states that everyone has sinned (Romans 3:9-20).
 - 1. Paul proves this by quoting several Old Testament passages (Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Proverbs 1:16; 3:15-17; Isaiah 59:7-8; Psalm 36:1).
 - 2. The condemnation was not restricted to the Jews. It applied to Gentiles as well. Therefore, no one can stand justified before God.

V. *The Solution To Sin*

- A. God's righteousness is manifested through someone that is not in the law (Romans 3:21-23).
 - 1. The law and the prophets gave evidence of its coming (Acts 3:20-25), but this righteousness is not based on keeping the law.

2. The law pointed to faith in the Christ as the means of salvation (Galatians 3:25). Since it was outside the law, it was equally available to all.
- B. Jesus' blood was the propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:24-26).
1. Since man is unable to rescue himself, God had to bridge the gap. The sacrifice of Jesus paid the debt owed by sin. Our response to that gift is faith and obedience.
 2. God's righteousness is shown in Jesus' sacrifice. Sins are not ignored -- they are atoned by His death. God shows Himself just when He justifies the believer.
- C. So then was the law useless (Romans 3:27-31)?
1. The law is certainly not useless because the operation of faith really upholds or establishes the law; i.e., the gospel vindicates the law.
 2. Breaking the law made the redeeming work of Christ necessary. Those who see that the cross was necessary will never feel that they can justify themselves by fulfilling the law's demands. If that were possible, Christ would have died in vain.

VI. ***The Illustration Of Faith***

- A. Paul uses Abraham, the father of the Israelites, to illustrate his point (Romans 4:1-3).
1. Paul's line of reasoning was directed against the contention of Judaizing Christians, not toward the unbelieving Jews.
 - a) These Judaizers put stress on their fleshly relation to Abraham and on the fleshly mark of circumcision (John 8:33).
 - b) Abraham came out of heathenism, and therefore had no fleshly connections of which he could boast, and he was also justified before he was circumcised because of his faith and obedience.
 2. The reward is reckoned to the person that works because it is due (Romans 4:4-8).
 - a) Paul is not condemning salvation by works in vs. 4; he is merely stating a truth.
 - b) If we could act perfectly to bring God in debt to us, He would pay the debt.
- B. But if a man sins once, salvation can never come to him as a debt. This kind of person can never be justified by works of law. He needs forgiveness, and the law does not forgive; it condemns (Romans 4:6-8; 6:23). Any righteousness on our part comes from God forgiving our sins, not from our earning righteousness.
- C. Does the law make a person righteous (Romans 4:9-13)?
1. The quote involving Abraham comes from Genesis 15:6, but Abraham was not circumcised until 13 years later in Genesis 17. So

Abraham's righteousness did not occur because he kept the provisions of the law.

2. If keeping the law could save, then faith would be unnecessary (Romans 4:14-15). But it is a law that no one can keep, even though the law itself was good (1 Timothy 1:8). With faith, we can see the grace of God in our salvation.

D. Abraham is the "father of us all" (Romans 4:16-25).

1. The "dead" are those who are spiritually dead. Paul had stated that the law "worketh wrath" but through the seed of Abraham all nations are blessed, thus it is to be concluded that Paul's statement that God "quickeneth the dead" is His assurance to us that those made dead through sin are forgiven or given life in Christ.
2. When God informed him that his covenant would be established with the son to be born to him by Sarah, he believed God. It took strong faith on the part of Abraham to accept God's promise that he would be the father of Isaac, and Paul showed that all down through Abraham's life of service to God he was righteous by faith.
3. That Abraham's faith was reckoned unto him for righteousness was written for the sake of those who now believe. It is a guarantee that the Christian's faith will be reckoned unto him for righteousness.

Conclusion. The Gentile vision of righteousness was based on the idea of works alone, and the Jewish vision of righteousness was based on heritage combined with works. Neither group placed any credence on faith. What Paul proved is that works alone cannot save, yet Paul never said that works are unnecessary (Romans 2:5-8).

Works done to earn salvation will not lead to salvation (Acts 10:1-2; 11:14). But works done because of belief in Jesus, seeking God's glory, and desiring immortality will save. This is why James is not in disagreement with Paul. Instead, he is addressing another group -- those who would try to isolate faith from works. Would you today have that obedient faith?