

# **"Justification by Faith Alone VI, Rahab the Harlot"**

## **James 2:14-26**

**July 19, 2009**  
**by C.W. Powell**

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (Jas 2:14-24 AV)

Read Joshua 2

Read James 2:25,26

Read Hebrews 11:30:31

There are several different ways to speak of the relationship between faith, works, and salvation. But we are in danger of doing violence to Scripture if we do not get this right.

We can say that Faith produces salvation, and we would be right, but we have not said enough.

We can say that Works produces salvation, and we would be very wrong.

We can say that Faith and works produce salvation, and we would still be wrong.

We can say that Faith produces works which produce salvation, and we would still be wrong.

We can say that faith produces both works and salvation, and then we would have it right. Faith is the means by which both our works and our persons are acceptable to God. The same faith that brings us to God is the same source of the works that we do that are acceptable to God. Without faith, neither our works nor our persons are acceptable to God.

I. Even though God had promised to give all of the land to Israel and all of the inhabitants were to be destroyed, yet this does not mean that they were not to be sensible and practical in planning their campaign and scouting out the land.

A. The men who were sent as spies also used practical good sense when they got into the city. They didn't go to the public square, but to a harlot's house. It has always been true in the societies of the ungodly that more unvarnished truth can be obtained in such places than in the washing a perfumed gatherings of the cultured and refined. Sometimes the cooks and the gardeners and the washerwomen knew more about what goes on in a great house than the master himself. Harlots, pickpockets and burglars often know more about a town than the city councilmen. It is also true that the spies would probably not come to the attention of the authorities there.

B. In spite of their precaution, the secret service of the King of Jericho was pretty good. Even though the spies had managed to sneak into the city, the news came to him that they were not only there, but had concealed themselves in Rahab's house. He also knew their mission, to spy out the land.

C. Rahab, however, knew the danger the men were in, and hid them on the roof of her house, which was next to the wall of the city; in fact, the wall of the city might have provided on wall of her humble dwelling. This would be the probably meaning of "upon the wall" in verse 15, although it could also mean that her house was upon the wall, although this is improbable.

D. She tells them that the men had fled and she didn't know where they were, but if they hurried and chased after them, they would probably be able to overtake them.

II. We then have this most interesting account of Rahab's conversation with the spies, after the men of Jericho had gone out of the city, thinking they would catch the spies.

A. She reported to them that the people of the land were terrified of Israel, because they knew that God had given the land to Israel. Their hearts had melted within them and they had no more courage. A great feeling of doom was hanging over the city of Jericho, and there was no more courage in them.

B. They had heard of the great things that God had done for Israel: The drying up of the Red Sea that had taken place a generation before, 40 some years. What a disaster this had been for Egypt in the loss of their entire army and chariots, leaving them vulnerable to their enemies for many years! Israel had also conquered two great kings before they crossed the Jordan River, Og and Bashan. Og was a giant of a man, but he and his kingdom had been overcome by Israel.

C. Rahab shows the work of the Holy Spirit in her heart and the beginnings of true faith. We know she had faith because the book of Hebrews says of her: "By

faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." (Hebrews 11:31 AV)

1. She confessed that Jehovah was the Lord of Heaven. Vs. 11

a) She shows that she had abandoned the world view of idolatry. The heathen world ascribed the rule of the spirit world to a multitude of God. How marvelous was this confession than she would turn her back on all the idols of the heathen world and ascribe the rule of the universe to the God of Israel.

b) She acknowledged that God ruled the hearts of men: the terror of God had fallen upon the city and the land of Canaan. It is not automatic that men will show courage and valor in battle. A great many battles in history have been decided by unknown panic and fear in the defeated. God is God of battles and He alone is the cause of their outcomes. Rahab understood something that most of the greatest men of the world have not understood.

c) She acknowledged that the Lord is God in earth beneath. She has confessed both the transcendence of God and the immanence of God--that He is both in heaven and in the earth. By his secret power he moves all things on the earth, but He cannot be moved by any creature.

2. James tells us that she did these things by faith: Just as Abraham did what he did by faith, so also did Rahab. The importance of the James passage is that a "living faith" is ascribed to Rahab, a faith like Abraham's.

a) Rahab did not have a dead faith, but a living faith, demonstrated by her lively good works.

b) Even though it is impossible to ascribe to Rahab the magnitude of the works that Abraham did, yet they both were justified by faith and worked in terms of the faith, according to the time and the place appointed by God.

3. Rahab knew that if she embraced the true God, then she must embrace the people of God, the people that God had chosen for Himself.

a) You cannot love God and despise the church. Don't say you love God, if you have contempt for the church of God.

b) A wise man knows who the enemy is and who his friends are. This poor harlot woman recognized that if she believed in the true

and living God, she would have to turn her backs on her countrymen and embrace the nation of Jews. They were now her people, with all their warts and wrinkles and faults. She had become the enemy of her countrymen.

c) We are not faced with exactly the same situation today, but over my years in the ministry I have known people who were counted enemies by their families when they came to Christ. There are also those who look on Bible Christians as disagreeable people who must be kept out of political power for otherwise they will do things that will harm the nation.

d) It is true that we are unutterably opposed to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and will oppose his works and philosophies, but we hope to rescue men from that kingdom that they might be brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

4. Rahab's faith, though not yet mature, for she does not speak of the Promise of Messiah, as Calvin says, does show the evidence of election. She rejects the gods of her countrymen and confesses faith in the true God to does all things in heaven and in earth after His own will, the one who rules the hearts of men and can send terror to a people. What a great distance she had come. How did she know these things?

### III. The results of her confession

A. She obtains a pledge that her family will be spared and given a sign and seal of the pledge. The scarlet line that she used to let them down over the wall would become the sign of the pledge that the men had given. Vs. 12, 18

B. This is an illustration of a sign and seal of a covenant. It did not happen by accident. They gave her a promise, she asked for a true token of the pledge and they gave it to her. In the same way, baptism and the Lord's Supper serve as tokens of the promises of God in the Gospel.

C. She immediately put the cord in the window, which showed how much she valued the token that they had given her. She trusted in the promise of God. She knew that the line was not the promise itself, but she put it there because she valued the promise of what was to come: the salvation of her house.

D. The spies returned, and Joshua knew that God would deliver Jericho, according to His promise, because the heart had gone out of the people of the land.

### IV. Application

A. Much is made of the lie of Rahab. Actually there are many lies in this passage: the secret mission of the spies who tried to deceive the men of Jericho; the lie of Rahab when she hid them under the flax on the roof; the lie she told to the men who came looking for the spies; the secret lowering of the men over the wall, etc. There is nothing in this passage that would ever give anyone an excuse for lying to their friends, neighbors, church, or so forth. But it is also true that Jericho was devoted to death. If warfare is legal then the arts of war are legal. If you may lawfully kill someone, then it would be lawful for you to deceive them. Pray that you will never be put in that position by God. But Rahab did the right thing. Anything else would have betrayed the spies and delivered them over to death. Even Calvin reproves her lie, but does not suggest what she should have done. It is also true that blessed is the man to whom the LORD will not impute sin.

B. The spiritual rules the physical. Although behind a great wall and possessing many valiant soldiers and great wealth, the city had lost its heart. The first judgments are spiritual--in the soul and the heart.

C. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, temperance, faith, meekness, and temperance are primary things in the Kingdom of God, and may not be despised without great harm.

D. When love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, temperance, faith, meekness, and temperance are lost then the world becomes filled with adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings,

E. Our inheritance will come by the going forth of the Holy Spirit and by His fruits, not by the works of the flesh. We are not called to take the sword to win our eternal inheritance, but to overcome evil with good and to be filled with the Spirit so that we will not do the works of the flesh.

F. It is interesting that Rahab is one of three women other than the Virgin Mary who are included in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1. The other two are Ruth, the Moabitess who was the grandmother of David and Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah. She played the harlot and had twins by her father-in-law after he had broken his promises to her. It shows that the election of God has no regard for any virtue in the elect. The Moabites were descended from the incest of Lot and his daughter after the destruction of Sodom; Tamar conceived twins by incest with her father-in-law; Rahab was a harlot from Jericho, but they all became mothers-in-Israel and blessed of God, not because of their sins, but that God might show His mercy and His grace.

G. Let us rejoice that our inheritance is secure in Jesus Christ and cannot be denied us for God has promised. It will come, not by might, nor by power, but by

the Spirit of God. Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall  
reap, if we faint not.

Amen and Amen.

God bless you.