

Justification by Faith, Part 4: Does James Contradict Paul?

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Bible Text: James 2

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Here is Machen's statement:

But what was the difference between the teaching of Paul and the teaching of the Judaizers? What was it that gave rise to the stupendous polemic of the Epistle to the Galatians? To the modern Church the difference would have seemed to be a mere theological subtlety. About many things the Judaizers were in perfect agreement with Paul. The Judaizers believed that Jesus was the Messiah; there is not a shadow of evidence that they objected to Paul's lofty view of the person of Christ. Without the slightest doubt, they believed that Jesus had really risen from the dead. They believed, moreover, that faith in Christ was necessary to salvation. But the trouble was, they believed that something else was also necessary; they believed that what Christ had done needed to be pieced out by the believer's own effort to keep the Law. From the modern point of view the difference would have seemed to be very slight. Paul as well as the Judaizers believed that the keeping of the law of God, in its deepest import, is inseparably connected with faith. The difference concerned only the logical—not even, perhaps, the temporal—order of three steps. Paul said that a man (1) first believes on Christ, (2) then is justified before God, (3) then immediately proceeds to keep God's law. The Judaizers said that a man (1) believes on Christ and (2) keeps the law of God the best he can, and then (3) is justified. The difference would seem to modern "practical" Christians to be a highly subtle and intangible matter, hardly worthy of consideration at all in view of the large measure of agreement in the practical realm.¹

And I won't read further except to read the statement of the Anglican Church on justification. This is Article 11 of the 39 Articles of religion. And then we'll look at the Baptist and Westminster statements.

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings.

¹ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1923), p. 23.

Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort; as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.²

And then, statement one from the Westminster—and it's identical to the Baptist. Well, it isn't identical. It's...the Baptist statement draws it out a little more fully. So I will read the Baptist statement. We flip it forward.

At this point I actually like the Baptist statement a bit better.

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins.³

Now, it's important at this point, both Baptist and Westminster make that same statement. Does God infuse righteousness into us? Yes, he does. But that's not how we're right with God. We're right with God by means of faith in Jesus Christ. But he also infuses righteousness in us. He changes us. He makes us good. But that's not what makes us right with God. It's that declaration that God has over us, based solely on what Jesus has done for us, not what Jesus is doing in us.

It's important. And most people miss this. It's important to maintain this distinction between justification—that's how we're right with God—and sanctification—which is this process that's life long but real and significant, nonetheless, whereby God makes us good. He makes us righteous. That's a process. There's an initial definitive act of sanctification where we experience a conversion. And we usually see in people's lives a significant change often occurring; a person maybe, who has lived a life of gross intemperance, just a drunk, comes to Jesus and he is set free and chains are broken, definitive sanctification. And yet there are other areas on that man's life that he struggles with for years and years and years. And he sees progress, but he never gets to the point in this life where he can be...where he can say of himself, "Well, I don't sin at all anymore."

So sanctification is a work. It's a process. It's progressive. We are less sanctified when we first come to Jesus and more sanctified if we seek the Lord as years go by. We become more and more like Jesus. That's what sanctification is. It's being set apart from the world and becoming more like Jesus.

But in justification it isn't a work, it's an act. It's an act that occurs at a moment of time. God declares us righteous and we are never more righteous or less righteous because justification has to do with our standing before God, not our state.

So it's a declaration God makes about us. And it isn't based on his infusing his righteousness in us, it's based on his putting to our account what Jesus has done for us; so just that word of explanation, again, in the Baptist statement.

² *The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, Article XI, "Of the Justification of Man."

³ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, "Of Justification," XI, i, and *The London Confession of Baptist Faith*, Chapter XI, i.

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, [even though he does do that] but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but [and this is why I like the Baptist statement because it splits it apart and it's an important truth] but by imputing Christ's active obedience.⁴

What is Christ's active obedience? It means that he kept the law for you and me. That's why we're not obligated to keep the law in order to be right with God. And that's why when we come to God and pray in Jesus' name we're praying and God hears us as if we were Christ; as if you and I had perfectly kept all those commandments. That's Christ's active obedience. It means that he actively kept the Ten Commandments. He kept those laws. He did them right down to the letter.

And when John the Baptist is there baptizing and Jesus said, "I want to be baptized," and John the Baptist said, "Hah. Look, hey. I have need to be baptized by you. Why are you coming to me to be baptized?"

And Jesus said, "Let it be so that we might fulfill all righteousness."⁵ Jesus left no stone unturned in terms of his absolute obedience to the revealed will of God.

And so that is put to our account. His active obedience is imputed to us. It's put to our account by imputing Christ's active obedience under the whole law and his passive obedience in his death for their whole and soul righteousness.

Passive obedience means what? There's nothing passive about Jesus, but we speak of Christ's passive obedience in the sense of his submitting. He's God. But in the work of redemption God the Son submits himself, subordinates himself to the Father. As Ham's question this morning in church about the ontological trinity meaning, "What is God in and of himself?" The Father is absolutely equal to the Son, the Son with the Holy Spirit, God in himself. But in the work of redemption the Son subordinates himself to the Father becoming the servant of the Father who submits to the Father's will and obeys the Father not just in keeping the Ten Commandments actively, but by passively—that is, submitting to the will of God—going to the cross.

So when we speak of Christ's active obedience we're talking about he keeps the Ten Commandments for us. He keeps the whole law of God for us. When we speak of his passive obedience we mean that he submits to the decree of the Father that he would come into history, be born of a virgin, live a sinless life, die on the cross in our place as our substitute. So when we speak of his passive obedience, when theologians speak of

⁴ *The London Confession of Baptist Faith*, Chapter XI, i.

⁵ Paraphrase of Matthew 3:15 (All Scripture references are taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated).

that, as the Baptists do in this statement, they are speaking about that work of Christ on the cross, submitting to the will of God, bearing our shame and scoffing rude in our place condemned he stood.

And so that.

And then they go on to say here: “for their whole and sole righteousness, their whole and sole righteousness.” If you have Christ you have his righteousness put to your account. And it’s all the righteousness you need. You don’t add to that righteousness one iota.

“...they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.”⁶

And then the Baptist and Westminster both with a minor prepositional phrase, identical in the next one here which is number two.

“Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.”⁷

Now, what did we see last week? We looked just looked very quickly at it. We saw that in this epistle to the Galatians saint Paul—and we saw this particularly two weeks ago—in the epistle to the Galatians he makes it extremely clear, Galatians one, how serious it is to deny that we are right with God solely by faith in Jesus Christ is to deny the gospel itself. And he speaks of the curse of God coming down on the person that denies that; Galatians chapter one—page 1810—verse eight, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”⁸

And in Galatians three he speaks about that gospel in such clear terms. He tells us—page 1812—Galatians 3:1. He says:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?⁹

⁶ *The London Confession of Baptist Faith*, Chapter XI, i.

⁷ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, “Of Justification,” XI, ii, and *The London Confession of Baptist Faith*, Chapter XI, ii.

⁸ Galatians 1:8

⁹ Galatians 3:1-5

And he goes right on through Galatians three and Galatians four; crystal clear, absolute clarity. We are right with God solely because of what Jesus has done for us. And we receive that gift of what Jesus has done for us solely by means of faith and yet, right in this letter to the Galatians, Paul is very plain in telling us—if we turn over to Galatians chapter five, Galatians chapter five—he says this when we look at the end here. He talks about, in 5:19—page 1815—Galatians 5:19: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious...”¹⁰ and he goes through a whole litany of them. And then he tells us in verse 21 mentioning: “...envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”¹¹ So it’s really important that we understand what Paul teaches before we tackle what James teaches.

What does Paul teach? He teaches that we are right with God solely on the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ. And yet he would tell us, in no uncertain terms, that real faith is never alone. There’s always a changed life. It’s important we stress that ‘cause there are two great errors that we have to constantly deal with in the history of Christianity. On the one hand is a legalism that denies the assurance of salvation. The moment that you add works to your standing before God you have immediately obliterated any real sense of security that we have in Christ.

“How do I know I’ve done enough?” If I’ve need faith plus works to be right with God. “How do I know I’ve done enough? How do I know I’ve done enough?” The moment that my obedience is part of my being declared righteous then I’ve lost assurance of salvation. Then, when somebody asks me, “Bob, do you know if you were to die today are you going to go to Heaven?”

I’d say, “Well, I hope so. I’m trying. I’m doing the best I can.”

The moment that you inject works into the equation you inject doubt. But if it is not based on my performance, but Christ’s performance, then what? Like I say, “Well, I put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He’s never let anybody down.”

“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”¹² But Saint Paul is quick to add here in Galatians that works are proof of real faith.

And, you see, the other error—the one error is works righteousness, legalism which denies our assurance—the other is what we want to call antinomianism, antinomianism or libertarianism or libertinism, that’s a better expression, libertinism, libertinism; being a libertine.

What do we mean by antinomian? Antinomian means against the law. Now, we need to make it plain that when we speak of antinomians we’re not talking about the Old Testa-

¹⁰ Galatians 5:19

¹¹ Galatians 5:21

¹² 1 Timothy 1:12 (King James Version – KJV)

ment laws, as such. What we're talking about is accepting immorality as a completely normal and acceptable part of life. And so last Lord's Day evening as we looked at 1 John chapter three we saw there "hereby we know the children of God and the children of the devil."¹³ People who can live in sin, get confronted with their sin and say, "Well, you know, I don't care what God says, I'm having a good time," we need to call into question whether those people know the Lord.

So I want you to see, here, that Paul is not an antinomian. He is neither a legalist who says, "Well, it's faith plus works that make you right with God." Neither is he an antinomian libertinism that says, "Well, live any way you want to and it makes no difference if you're having affairs, if you're stealing, if you're getting drunk. You know, don't let anybody ever try to make you feel guilty and feel bad." Look at what he says? I mean, it's very plain. There's no difference in James and Paul when you really understand what Paul's saying. And he says there in verse 21: "I warn you," bottom of page 1815, the first full sentence in the verse: "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."¹⁴ They won't inherit it.

So if I can live in adultery, if I can live in a life of murder, if a mafia hit man can believe in Jesus and go on killing people and being confronted with it, can still keep killing people, the point is: he never really came to real faith in Christ because faith—everybody that believes, somebody read for me Ephesians 1:14, Ephesians 1:14.

[Change of voice:]

"...who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."¹⁵

[Change of voice:]

Let's see. "...in whom after you believed you were sealed." Is that how it begins? I missed a verse. Was it verse....

[Change of voice:]

Thirteen.

[Change of voice:]

Thirteen, I'm sorry. I was off a verse.

[Change of voice:]

¹³ Paraphrase of 1 John 3:10

¹⁴ Galatians 5:21

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:14

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit...”¹⁶ and so forth.

[Change of voice:]

Yes. That’s right. So when you put 1:13 and 14 together in Ephesians this is the deal: You believe, you’re marked with a seal. What’s that seal? It’s embossing, embossing. You go down. You can get a legal document, legal document. What’s the difference in a Xerox copy—especially on a good copy machine—and a legal document? A legal document has what? A seal on it. It’s embossed.

I remember some years back when Benn was in college he decided to become a notary public. And so he has his little notary seal, and he can notarize documents, and you sign on a statement, and then he gets a witness to that, and then he writes his name and signs his name, and he takes his notary seal, and he presses that paper, and it gets raised letters, and you know it’s authentic. It’s been sealed. And the point is: the Holy Spirit seals us when we believe. We are worked on by the Holy Spirit before we believe, and God calls us by his Word and by his Spirit. We respond in faith. The faith is what we do, but it’s a result of what God is doing in us through the preaching of the Word. But then once we believe we experience an embossing with the Holy Spirit, and that produces a changed life. It’s not perfect, but it is a changed life.

You can touch a real Christian and get a little feel of Jesus, if you will, to use that illustration of being sealed. You are around a Christian. There’s a hint, at least, that there’s been...that he’s been sealed, that he’s been embossed, he’s been stamped, he’s been marked with Jesus. There’s a little bit about Jesus. You’re reminded of the Lord Jesus around a real Christian even in the very early days.

So what is Paul saying? He’s saying there’s a changed life, not perfect life. We saw that in 1 John last week. 1 John three: “Hereby we know the children of God and the children of the children of the devil.”¹⁷ People who don’t live a godly life at all are the devil’s own. People who try to live a godly life, even if they fail, but they keep repenting and keep seeking the Lord, well, they’re Christians. And you can see the difference.

The devil’s own can live in sin and can sin with a high hand. They don’t care. But a child of God is always going to be miserable when he falls into sin. Can you fall into sin? Absolutely. But you’ll be miserable in it. “Can’t get no satisfaction.” Wasn’t there a song about that? A believer can’t get no satisfaction with sin, if you pardon the grammar; can’t get no satisfaction in sin the way somebody in the world is in sin because why? There is always—there’s another song—“always something there to remind me.”

¹⁶ Ephesians 1:13-14

¹⁷ Paraphrase of 1 John 3:10

God's seed abides in us. So we can't sin. That is, we can't go on and on and on and on in sin. But he's not teaching sinless perfection because 1 John chapter one, verse eight says what? 1 John 1:8 says:

[Change of voice:]

“If we say that we have no sin...”¹⁸

[Change of voice:]

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves...the truth is not in us.”¹⁹ So John is not teaching complete perfection, but he is teaching a real change of heart.

So we need to understand something before we look at James chapter two. We have to understand that what Paul is teaching is what? Faith is the sole instrument whereby we are right with God, but real faith is never alone. So if I'm living a hellishly wicked life and I say I'm a believer I'm contradicting myself.

I'll never forget this, a couple of experiences from counseling...as I say, because I'm free, I've counseled lots of people over the years, often times for whatever reason, though not exclusively, often times over sexual things. And so a couple of things. Once was a young woman who was living in awful immorality, and she came to see me and...began to talk to her, and I began to present the gospel to her and she was a person who was a professing agnostic. She didn't know whether she believed in God or not.

So I began to present the gospel to her. Somebody says, “Well, I'm not sure whether I believe there's a God or not. I wrestle, you know. I'm not exactly an atheist. I'm not sure what I am. I don't know there's a God.”

So I began to try to present evidences for Christian faith, and I challenged her to put her faith in Christ. And do you know what she said to me? “Oh, I don't need to worry about that. I got saved some years back and once saved always saved.”

I said, “What? You know, you're not sure you believe in God, but you're sure you're saved? Why are you sure you're saved?”

“Because I prayed the sinner's prayer.”

What I'm saying is: That's a perversion of the gospel. That's a perversion of the gospel. We're not talking about entire perfection. We're not talking about never sinning again. But we're saying: If there's no change in the life, it didn't take. The sinner's prayer didn't take. You really weren't coming to Christ, as you thought, from the gospel. You may have repeated words in front of a preacher, but you didn't seek God with all your heart.

¹⁸ 1 John 1:8 (KJV)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

And, by the way, does the Scripture ever say that we're saved by praying a sinner's prayer, or does it say that we're saved by seeking the Lord with all our heart? The Lord says, "Seek me with all your heart and you will find me."²⁰

I think that sometimes we rush things with people. We don't like people to suffer. We don't like people to be in doubt. And so we try to give them quick assurance, you know, "Well, you prayed the prayer. Where's Jesus?"

Well, did they really seek the Lord?

You know, if you read the account of some of the people in history that the Lord really got a hold of their lives, sometimes they went through a dark night of the soul and sometimes it wasn't just a night. Sometimes it was days they wrestled with their sins, and they wrestled with seeking the Lord. And then they came to a point of assurance that they really had come to Christ.

And sometimes it's a moment of time as in John Wesley's account of his conversion that it was during a meeting of the Holy Club—interesting name for a club—the Holy Club and one of the brothers was reading Paul's...the introduction to Paul's letter to the Romans in Luther's commentary on Romans. And as those words were being read, Wesley's testimony is, "My heart was strangely warmed." He came to Christ as another brother was reading a commentary written by Martin Luther.

Conversion can take place in a moment. It may take hours. It may take days. The important thing is not repeating words, but seeking the Lord. And this is the promise: We can say to everybody that seeks the Lord, "You'll find him if you 'seek for me with all your heart.'"²¹

But the point is that we have a modern method of evangelism, of mass evangelism, that deals slightly with people and cries, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace."²²

And so we say to somebody, "You know, you come down the aisle, repeat this prayer with me, never doubt your salvation."

Well, here was a girl who wasn't even sure she would say there's a God, but she had no doubt that if there was a God she was going to go to Heaven because she got saved years ago even though she lived as an utter hellion and was a professing agnostic. I'm not talking about you and me, you know, occasionally struggling with an atheistic thought. I mean, you want to...you want to experience atheistic thoughts? Really begin to pray and intercede. The devil will fire some of those doubtful arrows at you, you know. "How do you know God's there?" "Why do you believe God's listening to your prayers?" Those are fiery darts. You have to understand you've got fiery darts.

²⁰ Paraphrase of Deuteronomy 4:29-30 and Jeremiah 29:13

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Jeremiah 6:14 and Jeremiah 8:11 (KJV)

I'm talking about something not with fiery darts, but somebody resting in agnosticism, "Oh, I don't know there's a God, but if there is I don't have to worry because I got saved."

Salvation is not a once for all experience with nothing that has to do with my life today. Salvation is a once for all experience, but if it is genuine, it has very much to do with where I am today. And if I start living in sin, if I'm a child of God, the Spirit of God isn't going to give me any rest or peace until I get it right with the Lord. That's what Paul teaches. That's what John teaches. And, we're going to see in a moment, that's what James teaches.

So let's look, then, at James chapter two. Are we clear on what Paul teaches? We're right with God solely by his grace. We receive that grace solely through faith in Christ, but real faith is never alone. There is a changed life.

Now, let's look at James two, which I think is a beautiful chapter in the Word of God and very, very important. But a lot of people feel uncomfortable when they read it. But let's read it slowly and stop and make little observations as we go.

James chapter two—page 1881. "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism."²³ The first thing we see in James two: What are the kinds of works that are in view here? It has to do with showing favoritism. What kind of favoritism? Well, he's going to let us know real explicitly what he's talking about.

Verse two:

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?²⁴

So what are the works that James is concerned about here in James chapter two? What do we see here?

[Change of voice:]

Favoritism.

[Change of voice:]

Ma'am?

²³ James 2:1

²⁴ James 2:2-4

[Change of voice:]

Favoritism.

[Change of voice:]

Favoritism. Yes, favoritism is what James two is all about.

[Change of voice:]

You've made a decision as to whether this person is better than that person.

[Change of voice:]

That's exactly right. You've made a decision of favoritism based...this person is better than this person. It's like today. I mean, do we ever struggle with this? Here comes Mr. Fat-cat into the church driving up in his...whatever it is people drive today and want to have a little extra pizzazz in their driving. And then here comes a guy, riding his bicycle up with his tennis racket strapped to it and you say, "Well, ok, here, oh, park your Rolls Royce here, sir. Come on in. And here, sit right here." And then you say to the guy who says look, "Hide that bicycle in the shrubbery over there and put that dad gum tennis racket...don't let anybody see that and that hat. Take that awful hat off and...." You know.

Am I getting too close to home here?

In other words James is talking about, in a pretty blatant way, there's a temptation we all have to go after the people who can do the *quid*...who can do the *quid*, in exchange for the *pro quo*; *quid pro quo*. You scratch my back I'll scratch yours.

The guy riding up on the bicycle with the tennis racket and the pull down over his ears hat we think, "He can't do any good for us." In fact, he's just going to run people off. And there are all kinds of rationalizations we can run through our minds. We can say, "Well, you know, we need to be reaching lost folks and if people see...you know, this guy, that bicycle and that tennis racket, if he starts coming here people aren't going to come here." But now if Mr. Big-bucks comes in here, Mr. Fat-cat comes in here, we can attract a whole lot more fat cats. If we treat Mr. Fat-cat right he might bring some of his more fat cat friends here."

Is that in us still today?

But now I want you to see that this is the very issue that's being dealt with in James two. He's saying, "Showing favoritism." He's saying that you're denying the gospel when you do this.

Listen to what he says in verse five.

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?²⁵

He's characterizing in a general way the difference in rich and poor. He's not saying that all poor people are going to Heaven and all rich people are going to Hell. That's not what he's saying. But he's saying as a general truth you find that people who have a lot of this world's goods tend to be disinterested in the gospel.

Now, we do know rich people who do know and love Jesus. And history is full of testimonies of rich and powerful people who have come to Jesus. But by and large the rich and the powerful are not interested in the gospel. And the people who are interested in the gospel are the ones who suffer in this world and who need somebody to help them. And this is what he's saying as a general truth.

Now, let's press on. Verse eight: "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, [and the royal law is"] 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"²⁶ It's a royal law because it's a summary of our entire duty to man. He says, "You are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers."²⁷ So, showing favouritism, discriminating against people is breaking the law.

Now, notice verse 10. And this is, perhaps, the most critical verse in the entire second chapter of James to keep us from reading it in a misunderstanding...and having a misunderstanding about what he is teaching. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."²⁸ That's an important verse because if we understand what James is saying here then we understand that James cannot be teaching us that we are right with God by keeping the law. Why? He says, "Whoever keeps the whole law but breaks one point is guilty of breaking the whole."²⁹ Chain is no stronger than its weakest link.

You know? Listen to what he says more explicitly as he spells it out. Verse 11: "For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker."³⁰

²⁵ James 2:5-7

²⁶ James 2:8

²⁷ James 2:8-9

²⁸ James 2:10

²⁹ Paraphrase of James 2:10

³⁰ James 2:11

And you come back to Jesus' basic teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Why does he say to men, "Whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her in his heart?"³¹ Why does he say to people: "Whoever says to his brother 'you fool' is in danger of the fire of hell?"³² Why does he say those things? Because Jesus knows human nature and knows that there's no man walking around the planet earth—from the time of puberty on—who hasn't committed adultery in his heart, at some point fantasizing about this or fantasizing about that.

What's Jesus' point? His point is not that he's going to get us into this point in life where we are never bothered by an unclean thought ever again. His point is to nail our hide to the wall and convict us of sin. And the same thing about, "Whoever says to his brother, 'you fool.'"³³ You know, a lot of people will call people a nut, a knit-wit, a crazy man, a twit, but never say "fool" because they're afraid. You know, "Well, if I say 'fool,' why I'm in danger of the fire of Hell."

"Stupid knit-wit. You nincompoop. You twit. You ignoramus."

The point is, "fool," is the English translation of a Greek word *raka*, ρακα. So if you want to get real literalistic about it I guess you don't have to worry about it unless you *raka* ρακα. The point is not about being literal with certain sounds of words, certain phonemes; it's about the attitude of the heart.

And I'm going to ask you a basic question. Is there anybody here tonight beyond the age of three...beyond the age of three...who hasn't called somebody, "A dumbo, you stupid person, you knit-wit." The point is we've all verbally abused others. We have.

And why does Jesus raise the issue? He's raising the issue to a group of self-righteous Pharisees to show them that what? They come short. That's why he said to his listeners, "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you're going to perish."³⁴ You're going to perish. You're not going to enter into the kingdom of God. You can't enter unto the kingdom of God unless your righteousness is superior to that of the scribes and the Pharisees.

The point is: The scribes and the Pharisees were good people. They were religious people. They read their Bibles. They memorized Scripture verses and they prayed and they gave money. But they weren't perfect. The trouble with the people is that they thought they were good enough. And Jesus' point is to tell them, "You're not good enough."

And I want you to see that in James here. James isn't teaching salvation by works because he's teaching us so plainly that if we break one commandment, if we come short in just one area, we're guilty of breaking all of it.

³¹ Paraphrase of Matthew 5:28

³² Paraphrase of Matthew 5:22

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Paraphrase of Matthew 5:20

Then he says in verse 12: “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!”³⁵

What’s he talking about there? The only people I’ve ever known who were really merciful people are people who have drunk deeply of God’s grace.

“Oh to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I’m constrained to be.”³⁶

You know, Jesus says, “He who has been forgiven much loves much.”³⁷

Merciful people are those who, in a deep and keen way, understand: “God’s been merciful to me. God has been kind to me.”

The people who are not merciful to others are those who feel good about themselves, who feel that they can commend themselves to God. The Pharisees of this world are harsh in dealing with other people.

“You messed up. I’m not going to give you another chance.”

For the person who has drunk deeply of God’s forgiveness and grace in Jesus Christ is willing to give other people another chance, willing to forgive.

“Well, you know, I don’t like what you did. It certainly hurt me deeply. But, you know, how can I refuse to forgive you since God has forgiven me so much?”

And the point, again, I want you to see as we read through the second chapter of James, it’s in a context of grace and it’s in a context that obedience has to be absolutely perfect. And if it’s not absolutely perfect it’s not enough.

So then what does he go on? Now we get to the meat of the coconut, verse 14: “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?”³⁸

And there’s the key thought. And it’s a little bit paraphrastic by their adding the word “such” but it brings out the flavor of what James is actually saying.

There are, after all, two kinds of faith, if you want to use the word “faith.” I would rather use the word “mere belief,” “intellectual assent to truth” rather than “faith.” Listen to

³⁵ James 2:12-13

³⁶ Robert Robinson, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

³⁷ Paraphrase of Luke 7:47

³⁸ James 2:14

what he's saying, again, verse 14—page 1882: “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?”³⁹

And he uses an illustration. And the illustration is not just an illustration to illustrate the point of an emptiness, but it's an illustration that fits right in the context. And what's the context? It has to do with showing favoritism as Aunt Martha said. It has to do with discrimination against the poor in favor of the rich man. And, once again, here we come back to the issue of the works that are in view here in James, the works that demonstrate faith have to do with our attitude towards people who can't help us. It's our *quid* for the no *pro quos*. A test of your faith? Your *quid* for the no *pro quos*. The test of your faith is not your *quid* for the *pro quos*, this for that, see? The test of your faith is...the evidence of real faith...is what do you do for people who can't do for you? That's what this is all about.

So look at what he says is his illustration of an empty faith that is mere assent to proposition; verse 15: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”⁴⁰

Isn't that stupid to think? “Hey, God bless you. Sorry you're naked. Sorry you don't have a house, a roof over your head. Sorry your stomach's empty. But I wish you well. God bless you, Man. Be filled and warm.”

He said, “That's just stupid, idiotic, empty talk.” It's just foolish empty talk. He says, “If one of you...” He says, but...he says, “What good is [that]? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”⁴¹

What's he saying? He's saying that real faith, real faith will always evidence himself in acts of faith. Real faith will always evidence itself in acts of faith.

Let's see more fully what he means here. Verse 18: “Someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ [Okay] Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.”⁴² Isn't that an absolute truth? Don't we show people what we really believe by how we act on it? What do we really believe? If we don't act on that faith do we really believe it?

You see, real faith involves taking some risks based on that real faith.

Let's read further. Verse 19 is another critical verse. You really want to understand James rightly there's some very key verses that you need to keep in your mind. What's James talking about here? He's not talking about Pauline faith. What's Pauline faith?

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ James 2:15-16

⁴¹ James 2:17

⁴² James 2:18

Pauline faith is a hearty trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, a surrender and a casting of myself on God's mercy in Christ. That's the faith that Paul talks about.

Well, what is James talking about when he talks about a faith that is an empty faith? Do you want to know? Here's the key verse to understand what he means. Verse 19: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder."⁴³

What is he talking about? Do you believe that two plus two equals four? Sure. That's what I was taught as a child—two plus two equals four—along with many other things in the math table by my mother at the kitchen counter, as she sat on one side a little booth in our kitchen, and I sat on the other, and she grabbed me by the cheeks and had a ruler, and when I didn't respond what's seven times seven, I'd get a pop on my hand with that ruler. And I learned, in spite of, you know, I don't know what I was. They didn't have all those ADHD labels back when I was a kid getting in trouble and getting spankings in the first grade, but Mama knew, first grade teacher that she was, registered nurse that she also was. She knew: "Reading, writing and 'rithmetic taught to the tune of the hickory stick." Well, she had one. I don't know if it was hickory or not, but it stung, and I learned, you know, "Okay. Two plus two equals four. Seven times seven is 49." And learn it. There, it's there. Pain, boy, if I ever stumble over math, I just pinch myself. Oh yeah, okay. Brings it back.

Now is that what "faith" is in Scripture? Is that faith in Christ?

Let me tell you: We talked this morning about the importance of holding to sound doctrine. I want you to know something. There's not a devil in Hell that believes false doctrine. I mean, is the devil orthodox? He doesn't want you to believe he's orthodox, but he is. He believes the Bible from cover to cover, okay? He knows the truth. The devils believe, he says, "the demons believe and they tremble."⁴⁴ I mean, they take it seriously, "Wow, man. Oh, no."

You know, you think about those power encounters between Jesus and the forces of darkness that are recorded in the gospels. Over and over again, when Jesus begins to command demons to come out of people what is their response: "Have you come"...to do what? "Torment us"...what? "Before the time," ahead of time. What does that tell you about demons? They believe in Hell. They believe in a future judgment. They believe in a Lake of Fire. "Have you come to torment us before the time? Hey, we're having our last hurrah here. Can't you leave us alone a little while longer? It's not time for us to quit yet."

Are they orthodox? Do they believe sound doctrine? Absolutely. The devil knows the Bible. When Jesus is tempted in the Judean wilderness, what does Satan begin to do to him? Jesus quotes Scripture to the devil, the devil starts quoting it back. "I've read that book, too. I know some of that stuff. Here. Try this."

⁴³ James 2:19

⁴⁴ Paraphrase of James 2:19

The devil knows the Bible. The devil believes the Bible. Here's a basic truth of orthodoxy: One God. You believe in one God as over against all the pagans around you. He's speaking to Jewish Christian believers. If you think you're superior because you don't believe in Zeus and all these other gods and goddesses of the pagan world around you and makes you good, makes you superior, you believe in one God? Hey, Man, did you know the demons believe and they shudder?

Shuddering is actually there in the shadows. Oh, Man. They're just shaking. They are terrified. It bothers them. "Have you come to torment us before the time?"

So they know there's judgment coming. They know that. But saving faith is more than that. If it's not more than that it's not real saving faith. Saving faith does involve acceptance of propositions as true.

I believe Jesus died and rose again. I believe he's coming again. I do believe that. That's a proposition. That is a set of truths. I accept those truths as true. But real faith is more than that. Real faith demands a response. And if there's no response, it's not real faith.

Let's illustrate it this way. There's a great illustration for evangelism to illustrate the difference between faith and mere belief. Here it is.

House is on fire. You're in the second story of the house. The fire has engulfed the stairwell. The window is open. Your father is Arnold Schwarzenegger, massive biceps and triceps, a giant of a man. He stands below that second story window. You are five years old. You weigh 60 pounds. Arnold Schwarzenegger is there and weighs 280 pounds, not an ounce of fat, total muscle. You can look at the situation. You can say, "If I stay in this house, I'm going to burn up." You can say, "The fire is coming up the stairwell. It's getting hotter." You can look at Arnold Schwarzenegger, your daddy, and you can know that he is able—if you jump out of that window—to grab you and keep you from hitting the ground. You can know that he's your daddy and he loves you. You know that he loves you so much that he is willing to take your place, dying in the flames of that fire rather than to let you die in that house. You can have an absolute belief in the truth that Arnold Schwarzenegger is your daddy and he loves you and that he's strong enough, if you jump, to catch you and you can still burn up.

You've got to jump out of the window. And biblical faith is jumping out of the window...if you want to put it that way. There is nothing meritorious about your jumping out of the window. You're not saving yourself. I mean, if Arnold is not there to catch you, you just go splat, okay. But you cast yourself on God's mercy in Jesus Christ. There is a response of faith that is real faith. In the devils you see what? They are in the burning house. They're not going to come and jump. Of course, there's no provision for their salvation. God didn't send his Son to die for angels. "He took on himself the seed of Abraham."⁴⁵ He died for human beings.

⁴⁵ Hebrews 2:16

The point is that the demons are in the house. They know the consequences. They shudder. They have mere intellectual assent. Mere intellectual assent is an element of faith, but it is not all there is. Real faith means I come and I cast myself on God's mercy in Christ.

You know, I think in the Presbyterian Church when we ask a person...when they join the church, we ask them to assent to five questions. "Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God justly deserving his displeasure without hope, except for his sovereign mercy? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners and do you receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel?"

You see, it's receiving Christ. It's resting on Christ. It's coming to Christ. That's what faith is.

And so what we need to understand is that James is talking about something a little different when he talks about faith. And he's also using the word, justification, a little bit differently than Paul is using it.

James, in using the word "faith" is speaking about, really, two kinds of faith; a faith that is mere belief versus biblical faith. Biblical faith, real faith, saving faith, a faith that rests in Christ can always be visible by how it acts. And if there's no response, if there's no changed life, then obviously it's nothing more than intellectual agreement with truth, the same intellectual agreement that demons have.

So we go on further, he says.

You foolish man [verse 20] do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see [verse 22] that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.⁴⁶

Here's the whole point. Is there merit in Abraham being willing to sacrifice Isaac? Or is his being willing to sacrifice Isaac simply confirmation that he has real faith?

Here's a catch way of putting it. "We are justified by faith alone, but we justify our faith by works. We are justified by faith alone, but we justify our faith by our works."

What does it mean, then, to justify? You remember the story of the Good Samaritan. This is an interesting question, an interesting example to illustrate the root meaning of justification. The gospel of Luke...and turn with me, if you will for a moment...make sure I can find it fast. Yes. The Good Samaritan. And let's see here. That's it. Okay. Page 1612—Luke chapter 10, verse 25:

⁴⁶ James 2:20-22

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” [Verse 29] But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”⁴⁷

Now, let’s ask the question: You notice that Jesus immediately nails this guy to the wall.

“You want to inherit eternal life? Well, here’s...well, what do you read in Scripture?”

“Well, you got to love God with all your heart, soul and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus said, “Well, that’s the right answer. Do that and you’ll live.”

Of course, the man immediately realizes that he doesn’t do that. So he asked, “Who is my neighbor?”

Why does he ask that question? He wants to justify himself. Now, what does it mean to justify yourself?

Here’s the question: Did this man ask this question because he wanted to change how he lived or because he wanted to feel good about himself? The answer is: He wanted to feel good about himself. He asked the question, “Who is my neighbor?” so he could get himself off the hook. He didn’t ask the question so he could then go about changing his whole life. This guy doesn’t want to change his whole life. This guy is like the rich young ruler in a certain sense. He’s a good moral man in one sense of the word. He pays his tithes. He reads his Bible. He prays. But he doesn’t want to sacrifice how he lives. He’s self-sufficient and he wants to continue feeling that way. So he asked the question, “Who is my neighbor,” so as to justify himself.

What does he want? He wants a declaration about himself to his own conscience that says, “Hey, man, you’re okay. You don’t have to...you don’t, you know, you don’t have to love those Samaritans over there. You don’t have to love those Gentiles that have invaded your land. You don’t have to love these Romans like Pontius Pilate. You just love the people who are like you. You like people like George and Jackie and Ham and Nancy. That’s okay, see. But that guy on the bicycle with the tennis racket, that’s not your neighbor.”

And he’s asking that question because he wants to say, “I’m okay. I don’t need to change. I don’t need to get radical and get real with God and get down on my face before

⁴⁷ Luke 10:25-29

God and cry out and say, “Help me, change me, Jesus. I need changing. I got a bad heart.”

This guy is not asking that question because he wants to change from the inside. He’s asking the question so he can be declared righteous to himself. And you know, really, there are really two different stances in this world. We either are justifying ourselves in any situation or we’re ‘fessing up and being honest with God and saying, “Man, I messed up.”

Got a conflict with somebody? Sooner or later we all do, don’t we? When we’re really going to get release is when we get honest and get real with God and say, “Lord, I messed up. My heart wasn’t right when I said those words. You know my heart. I was wrong. I was wrong. Help me.”

He asked the question because he wants to be justified. He wants to be declared righteous. He wants somebody to put a seal of approval and say, “You’re okay.” He’s looking for a way out other than radical surrender and a plea for radical change.

Now, here’s the point. We are declared righteous by means of faith alone. But our faith is declared to be genuine faith by our works. If there are no works, obviously there is no real faith. If we don’t leap out of the window into the arms of Arnold Schwarzenegger, our daddy, we obviously don’t really believe—in a biblical sense. Our faith is evident; our faith is justified; we are declared righteous by how we live, in that sense.

Let’s turn back to James chapter two and see if we can wrap this up just for a moment. James chapter two. What is he saying? He’s saying in James chapter two—page 1882. Abraham believed God’s promise that “in you all the nations will be blessed.” Abraham was given a promise that his child Isaac would succeed him and that Isaac, too, would be the seed in whom the nations of the world would be blessed. He believed that. Hebrews 11 makes it plain that Abraham believed that even if Isaac died he would be raised up by God. That’s his faith. Did he really believe it? How do you know his faith was genuine? What is the seal of approval that tells you that he really believed that? He was willing to offer Isaac up as a burnt sacrifice. If he had not been willing to do that, his faith would not have been justified by his works.

It sounds tricky what I’m saying. We are justified by faith, but our faith is justified by our works. Justification is what? Justification is a declaration. God declares us righteous when we put our trust in Christ. When we do our works, our faith is justified by our works. It is declared to be good, right faith, true faith. That’s what he’s saying.

So in that sense we can say that Abraham is justified by his works, as he says there in verse 22. “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend.”

Now, this is a very difficult verse, verse 26, but if we've understood Paul correctly that we're justified by faith alone—but by faith that is never alone, it is always accompanied by a changed life—then you understand what he is saying in verse 24: “You see that a person,” top of page 1883, “that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.”⁴⁸

Now, what does he mean? Well, at this point we come to a fundamental principle about how we approach Scripture. If we have something that's unclear, we go to what is clear. What is clear in the book of James? What's clear is: He can't be teaching that we're right with God by our works because he tells us, very plainly, that if we have one flaw in our obedience, we're guilty of breaking the whole. Secondly, he makes it very plain that he means something a little different by faith than what Paul means. He's talking about two kinds of faith: real faith that's just like what Paul is talking about, and mere acceptance of facts because of what he says about demons. The demons believe and they shudder.

So what is he saying? In reality, what he is saying goes on further. We'll come back to that, verse 25. “In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?”⁴⁹ A similar example. Why did Rahab receive the spies in peace, hide them out and send them out in a different way? Why did she do that? She did that because of what she believed. And Hebrews 11 makes that plain.

Here is the basic question. And, again, we have to understand that James uses certain words a little differently than Paul does. Remember, the whole of the Bible is God's Word, but he uses different human authors who sometimes use words a little differently from each other.

Does Rahab...if Rahab really believed the truth about God and she turned those spies over to the king of Jericho, would her faith have been genuine? No, indeed. Her faith is justified by her works. How is she right with God? By her works? No. She's justified by her faith. But her faith is justified by her works. That is, her faith is declared to be a genuine faith by how she lives.

Is the language, may we say, somewhat careless? Well, in view of controversies of the 16th and 17th centuries, we might like that James had explained himself a bit more. But if we analyze it, we have to come down to the basic truth. He is not talking about our being right with God by our deeds because our deeds have to be completely perfect. It's obvious he's talking about two kinds of faith: a faith that is mere intellectual assent to truth like the demons have, versus a hearty trust that exhibits, by how it acts, that it genuinely trusts.

Abraham believed the promise of God and that's why he's willing to offer up Isaac. And the genuineness of his faith is demonstrated by his works. To say that his faith is demon-

⁴⁸ James 2:24

⁴⁹ James 2:25

strated as genuine is to say, "His faith is justified by his works." It's declared to be the real McCoy.

The same with Rahab the harlot... She's right with God by putting her trust in God and his promises. But the genuineness of that faith is exhibited by the fact that she accepts the spies, hides them out, protects them and sends them a different way. She exhibits her faith by her deeds. She's justified by faith, but her faith is justified by her works, declared to be the genuine article.

And the conclusion of the matter is in verse 26: "As the body without the spirit is dead, so [the] faith without deeds is dead."⁵⁰ A faith that has no deeds is an empty, vain, faith just as a human body without a spirit is obviously a corpse. You go down to Hixon Brothers, Kramers, you open up the back. Everybody is complementing the work of the undertakers. They all lie and say, "Oh, there, she looks like she's asleep." "Oh, doesn't he look so good?" They're all lying. They are. I've never seen a good looking corpse yet, have you? What do you see? You see, the minute you open the box and look you say, "There's something missing here." What's missing? The person's missing. His spirit's gone. Her soul is gone. The real person is gone. You're looking at a shell.

He says, "In the same way the faith that has no works to demonstrate that it is genuine is as lifeless and sterile and meaningless as a corpse."

Any questions or comments before we close?

Language is difficult at points. James is not attacking Paul. They are in fundamental agreement. They are writing to a different audience. They are expressing that biblical faith dealing with different errors.

I'll close with this illustration. If we were dealing with people who did not believe in the true deity of Christ and that were the audience I would be preaching to, I would preach on verses that teach that Jesus is God, Jesus is God, Jesus is God. And someone might go away having heard that one sermon thinking I didn't believe Jesus is a human. On the other hand, if I'm speaking to an audience that believes in the deity of Christ... believes that his manhood is just an illusion, that he wasn't a real human being, that he didn't come in the flesh... I might stress over and over again the humanity of Jesus. He was a real human being. He had body and bones and blood just like we do. He had a human soul, human spirit, human heart, human will, human emotions. Somebody listened to that and goes out and thinks, "And that doesn't... that guy doesn't believe that Jesus is God."

The point is the different controversies call forth, sometimes, a different polemic or a different argument. James is dealing with a phony baloney faith that doesn't have any evidence of a changed life. And the fundamental issue that James is concerned about is: how we deal with poor people, with people who can't do us any favors. That's the fundamental thing.

⁵⁰ James 2:26

So, let's pray.

Lord, we pray that you would bless us that we might, indeed, be people who are zealous to maintain good works not as the basis of our being declared righteous by you, but Lord, by as a way that others can see the genuineness of our faith and glorify our Father in Heaven. Lord, we pray that each of us would justify, declare our faith to be genuine, by the way that we live. And we pray, Lord, for that big test which is: How do we treat people who can do us no good? Lord, help us to be kind to the poor in Jesus' name. Amen.

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