

Faith and Works

Justification by Faith, Justification by Works

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?...

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 how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only (James 2:14, 20-24).

James 2:14-26 has been an enigma over the years for many individuals studying the salvation message in Scripture. But that should not be the case at all, *unless* a person tries to see the salvation which we presently possess — the salvation dealt with in Eph. 2:8, 9 — as the salvation or justification being dealt with in James.

Faith and works in relation to salvation or justification in James is completely consistent with and perfectly in line with the overall salvation message taught elsewhere in Scripture. James is dealing with the salvation of the soul (James 1:21), not with the salvation which we presently possess; and, unlike the absence of

works in connection with man in the salvation which we presently possess, works are presented after a different fashion in Scriptures dealing with the salvation of the soul, for man now appears in an active rather than a passive sense in the matter.

In James 2:14, two self-answering questions are asked. The negative used in the Greek text (*me*) necessitates that the two questions be understood in a “no” respect. A proper translation of the verse into English, with the Greek negative *me* in view, would read along these lines:

“My Brethren, though a man say he has faith, but does not have works, he cannot profit, can he? Faith [*i.e.*, faith apart from works] cannot save him, can it?”

And further down in the chapter, comments and examples are given concerning faith and works in relation to salvation. In verse twenty-one, Abraham is seen as having been justified by works when he had offered his son on the altar, as seen in Gen. 22:1ff. And, calling attention to Gen. 15:6, it is further stated in verse twenty-three that Abraham, at this same time, acted by faith; and God reckoned Abraham’s faithfulness to him for righteousness.

The same account, Abraham offering his son, is referenced in Heb. 11:17. And in this verse, *faith to a saving of the soul*, as in James, is inferred from the way this chapter is introduced in the last two verses of the previous chapter.

“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul [*lit.*, ‘but of faith to a saving of the soul’]” (10:38, 39).

With these two verses leading into and introducing chapter eleven, providing the subject matter, each reference to “faith” in the chapter should be understood in line with these verses, as *faith to a saving of the soul*. This chapter, as James 2:14-26, has to do with present and future aspects of salvation, not with the past aspect. And this chapter, exactly as in James, has to do with

faith and works in relation to this salvation. And, as in James, so in Hebrews — *the actions of individuals in relation to the salvation of the soul are seen.*

Actually, in Scripture, there is no such thing as *salvation apart from works*, whether past, present, or future aspects of salvation. As well, in Scripture, there is no such thing as *salvation apart from grace and faith.* The wording in Eph. 2:8, “by grace...through faith,” would apply not only to the past aspect of salvation, as seen in this verse, but to present and future aspects of salvation as well — *the salvation of the soul* (ref. the author’s book, SALVATION OF THE SOUL).

(Both “grace” and “faith” are seen in relation to the salvation of the soul in I Peter 1:9:

“Receiving the end [‘goal’] of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

“Grace” in relation to the salvation of the soul in v. 9 is seen in vv. 2, 10, 13; and “faith” in relation to the salvation of the soul is seen in vv. 5, 7-9.)

The salvation which we presently possess is wrought through Divine works — *the Spirit breathing life into the one having no life* — and is based on a finished, Divine work, *the finished work of God’s Son.* Unsaved man is spiritually dead and cannot function in the spiritual realm. He can do no more than allow God to do a work on his behalf.

But, once man has passed “from death unto life,” coming into possession of *spiritual life*, he can then be active in the spiritual realm. And, as *the ruined earth* was able to bring forth in Genesis chapter one after the Spirit of God had moved upon the face of the waters, God had spoken, and light had come into existence (vv. 2b, 3, 11), *ruined man*, as well, is able to bring forth following a Divine work on his behalf (Eph. 2:8-10).

Once man possesses spiritual life and is able to function in the spiritual realm, as in Hebrews chapter eleven or James chapter two, he, as the earth in Gen. 1:11, can *bring forth.* But *faith must precede and be inseparably connected with man bringing forth,*

producing works. And to understand how this all comes together, a principle from the Old Testament must be understood first.

An Old Testament Principle

To understand the proper relationship between faith and works in the lives of the people of God, one must understand a principle set forth a number of places in the Old Testament. And this principle is presented in a dual sense in Genesis chapters eighteen and nineteen.

1) Genesis 18, 19

Genesis chapter eighteen begins with the Lord, accompanied by two angels, appearing to Abraham in the plains of Mamre. The Lord had come down to personally see if the report which He had heard about the things happening in Sodom and Gomorrah was true (vv. 20, 21).

(The Lord, in His omniscience, didn't need to come down in this manner, for He already knew. But this is simply the manner in which Scripture, at times, presents matters of this nature.)

But, though the Lord said, "I will go down," He remained with Abraham while the two angels accompanying Him went on down into the Jordan plain, into Sodom (vv. 21, 22).

In that respect, did the Lord go down into the Jordan plain, as He said that He would? Or did the two angels alone go down into the plain?

To address these questions, note something very similar, presented after a different fashion, in chapter nineteen. The two angels, having seen first-hand that which was happening in Sodom, told Lot to take his family and leave the city. Sodom, along with three other cities of the plain (Deut. 29:23), was about to be destroyed.

"For we [the two angels] will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it" (v. 13).

Further down in the chapter, after Lot and his family had lingered in the city, the two angels took them by their hands and led them outside the city (vv. 15, 16). Once this had been done, and Lot and his family were subsequently safe in Zoar, a nearby city which was spared (vv. 17-23),

“Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (v. 24).

Who destroyed the cities of the plain? First the angels said that they would destroy Sodom (with the other three cities not mentioned at this point), and they further stated that the Lord had sent them to destroy Sodom. But, at the time of the destruction, the Lord is seen destroying Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other two cities (*cf.* Deut. 29:23).

Did the angels bring about this destruction, as they said they would do? Or did the Lord bring about this destruction, as the text goes on to state?

The principle seen in these two chapters has to do with angels acting under God’s fixed laws, with their actions being seen as the actions of the One Who established these laws. Thus, matters can be stated either way, as seen in the chapter — *the two angels going down into Sodom is also seen as the Lord going down into Sodom, or the two angels destroying the cities of the plain is also seen as the Lord destroying the cities of the plain.*

God governs the universe through angels in this manner. Angels, placed by the Lord in regal positions throughout the universe, govern the universe under fixed laws. And, through so doing, their actions are seen as the Lord’s actions.

To see the converse of this, note Satan’s actions at the time of his fall. Satan had been placed over the earth, as the earth’s ruler. But the day came when he stepped outside the fixed laws under which he ruled and, on his own, sought to occupy a higher regal position than the one in which God had placed him. His actions thus ceased to be God’s actions, being his own. And this resulted in his fall and subsequent judgment (*cf.* Isa. 14:12-17; Dan. 4:17, 25).

2) Numbers 13, 14; Joshua 6-8

This same principle is seen again in the account of the Israelites under Moses at Kadesh-Barnea, and again thirty-eight years later under Joshua after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River.

The Israelites, in both instances, were to go into the land and slay or drive out every single inhabitant (Deut. 7:1ff). The Israelites, going into the land with this goal in view, were to “diligently keep the commandments of the Lord...his testimonies, and his statutes” (Deut. 6:17). And they were to go into the land *believing that God would do that which He had stated that He would do*:

“And the Lord thy God will put out these nations before thee by little and little: Thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee.

But the Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed.

And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them” (Deut. 7:22-24).

God had commanded His people to go in and take the land, and He had told them what He would do as they entered the land to take it. Going into the land, they were to act completely by *faith, believing God* (cf. Heb. 11:29, 30). And, *remaining in the realm of faith, their actions would be the Lord's actions*.

Though the Israelites would be slaying the enemy, acting within the realm of faith, the Lord would be slaying the enemy. The Lord would be going ahead of them and delivering the enemy into their hands. It is the same picture, seen from a different perspective, as the angels acting under fixed laws in Genesis chapters eighteen and nineteen.

Under Moses at Kadesh-Barnea though, failure rather than success is seen. Twelve spies had been sent into the land to spy out the land. After forty days and nights they brought back a report concerning the land and the people therein — a land flowing with milk and honey, inhabited by a strong people, some of gigantic stature.

Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, then rendered a *positive statement* concerning entering the land, with Caleb calming the people and exhorting them, saying,

“Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30).

But the other ten followed with a *negative and false statement* concerning entering the land. They said,

“We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we” (Num. 13:31).

The people believed the false statement of the ten spies, began to murmur against Moses, and sought to appoint a new leader and return to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4). And, as a result, in the words of Heb. 6:4-6 (which, drawn from the account in Num. 13, 14, has to do with Christians doing exactly the same thing in the antitype relatively to the heavenly land of their calling and its inhabitants [Satan and his angels]), the Israelites *fell away* at Kadesh-Barnea; and it was then *impossible* “to renew them again unto repentance [unto a change of mind].”

At this point in the account, the Israelites committed a sin referred to in Num. 15:30 as a *presumptuous sin* and in Heb. 10:26 as a *sin for which there was no sacrifice*, with nothing but judgment then awaiting the nation. And, because of the particular nature of this sin, God wasn't going *to repent*; that is, God wasn't going *to change His mind* (this is the “repentance” also referred to in the antitype, in Heb. 6:6).

The very next day, the generation of Israelites under Moses repented, changed their minds, and sought to enter the land and defeat the enemy. But God didn't repent, didn't change His mind. *God couldn't change His mind and, at the same time, remain true to His Word.*

God was no longer among them with respect to their entering and taking the land. God would no longer go before them and deliver the enemy into their hands. And, as a result, the Israelites attempting to enter the land the next day and overthrow a stronger

enemy were themselves overthrown and driven back.

Their actions were their own, not the Lord's (Num. 14:40-45). And their actions were performed *separate from faith*, for they went forth contrary to that which God had told them. Thus, *defeat*, not victory, could only have been their lot.

As a result of that which occurred at Kadesh-Barnea, over the next thirty-eight years the entire generation of Israelites twenty years old and above, save Caleb and Joshua, died in the wilderness, outside the land.

Then, once these years had passed and those in the previous generation had died, Joshua, about to lead the second generation of Israelites into the land, sent two spies into the land ahead of the nation. And upon their return, they said to Joshua,

"Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land: for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us" (Joshua 2:24).

The Israelites this time, unlike the previous generation under Moses, believed God and prepared to enter the land and trust the Lord to deliver the enemy into their hands.

After crossing the Jordan River, the first battle involved the destruction of Jericho. And the Israelites, believing God, experienced victory.

The next battle involved the destruction of Ai. The city was not deemed large enough to require the entire Israeli army, so only about three thousand men were sent to take and destroy Ai. But, unlike the battle of Jericho, the Israelites were soundly defeated and driven back, with a number being slain (Joshua 7:1-5).

Joshua, seeking the Lord's face concerning the reason for this defeat, was told by the Lord, "Israel hath sinned..." Then, seeking that referred to by the Lord, Joshua found an Israelite (Achan) who had kept forbidden spoils from the previous destruction of Jericho. There was sin, unfaithfulness, in the camp. The matter was taken care of, and then the inhabitants of Ai could be defeated, with the Lord delivering the city into the Israelites' hands (Joshua 7:6ff).

Thus, as long as the Israelites went forth in the realm of *faith*, the Lord gave the victory. The battle was the Lord's. *It could be said that the Israelites destroyed Jericho and Ai, along with their inhabitants; and it could also be said that the Lord destroyed these two cities, along with their inhabitants.*

3) 1 Samuel 17

This same principle is seen again in the account of David slaying Goliath.

David was *an unproven* "youth" in battle (probably in his late teens), going up against "a man of war from his youth." This man of war, Goliath, was the Philistine army's champion and stood between nine and ten feet tall (1 Sam. 17:4, 33).

Goliath, to meet David, came out with full armor, carrying a spear and a sword, with a shield-bearer moving with him. The coat on his armor alone weighed about one hundred twenty-five pounds and the head of the sphere weighed about fifteen pounds (1 Sam. 17:5-7, 41ff).

On the other hand, David refused to wear armor as he went forth, for "he had not proved" himself in battle. He went forth to meet Goliath *without armor or a shield-bearer and with only a sling and five smooth stones* which he had picked up in a nearby brook and placed in his bag (1 Sam. 17:39, 40).

He though would need no armor or shield-bearer and would need only one of the five stones. And the reason is seen within David's words to this gigantic champion of the Philistine army:

"Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from off thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands" (1 Sam. 17:45-47).

David went forth *by faith*. He went forth believing God, knowing that God would remain true to His Word and deliver the Philistine into his hands.

Acting apart from the Lord, David would have been powerless. He would have easily been defeated and slain by the Philistine. But, acting by faith, David could only be victorious; acting by faith, David easily defeated the Philistine champion.

David slew Goliath. But it could also be said that the Lord slew Goliath. It is the same principle seen in the actions of the two angels in Genesis chapters eighteen and nineteen. *Acting under fixed laws*, the actions of these angels were seen as the Lord's actions; and *acting by faith*, David's actions were seen as the Lord's actions.

Thus, comparing these accounts in Genesis, Numbers, Joshua, and I Samuel, *acting by faith can only be seen as acting under a fixed Divine law which cannot change.*

From Faith to Faith

"Faith" is simply *believing that which God has to say about a matter*. And, in the realm of *faith and works*, acting by faith is not acting in a realm where one seeks to go out to do a work for the Lord. Rather, acting by faith is completely stepping aside from one's own self and allowing the Lord to do a work through the one exercising faith. And the work done through the one exercising faith will be the Lord's work; it will be a work emanating out of faith and performed in the spiritual realm, completely apart from the man of flesh.

The Christians' works tried at the judgment seat will fall into two categories, described by "gold, silver, precious stones" and "wood, hay, stubble" (I Cor. 3:12ff).

The former works (described by "gold, silver, precious stones") *will emanate out of faith and will be works which the Lord performed through the individual*. These works will endure the testing through fire, for they will be *the Lord's works*.

The latter works (described by "wood, hay, stubble"), on the other hand, *will be those performed separate from faith, by the individual himself, through the energy of the flesh*. The Lord will have had

nothing to do with them, and they will be burned by the fire.

The Christian life is one where two things must be operable throughout: “grace” and “faith.” “Grace” can be defined as *that which God is able to do entirely apart from human intervention*. And “faith,” as previously seen, is simply *believing that which God has to say about a matter*.

If one moves outside the realm of “grace,” he moves outside the realm where God can be active in his life, for God always acts in the realm of grace; and if one moves outside the realm of “faith,” he moves outside the realm where he can be acceptable to God, or where God can be pleased with his actions (Heb. 11:6).

As previously shown, both “grace” and “faith” are seen operable not only in the salvation which we presently possess (Eph. 2:8, 9) but also in the salvation of the soul, the present and future aspects of salvation (I Peter 1:2ff). Thus, it should be a simple matter to see and understand that “grace” and “faith” *must always be operable at any point in the overall salvation message* — past, present, or future. Man has been saved by grace through faith; man is being saved by grace through faith; and man is about to be saved by grace through faith.

But, since man’s works cannot enter into the realm where God’s grace exists, how can grace and works co-exist in connection with the saving of the soul in James 2:14ff? Note Rom. 11:6:

“And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work.”

It is *man’s works* which cannot enter (Eph. 2:8), not *God’s works*. And *God’s works must always enter into the matter*.

Note *salvation by grace* which we presently possess. This salvation is a Divine work (the Spirit moving, God speaking, light coming into existence), which is based on another Divine work — Christ’s finished work at Calvary. And since a continuing work of grace is also involved in the continuing aspect of salvation (the salvation of the soul), *God’s works, not those of man, must likewise be seen throughout*.

Romans 4:1-4 clearly reveals that *works emanating from the flesh, from man* (vv. 1, 2) cannot enter into the realm of either “faith” (v. 3) or “grace” (v. 4). The works must be *God’s works being performed through an individual exercising “faith,”* as in James 2:21-24 and Heb. 11:17. And since they are *God’s works, “grace” can enter into the matter;* and since they are *works being done through man, “judgment” on the basis of works can occur.*

The whole of the matter surrounding *faith and works* is that simple to understand.