



Salvation: By Faith or By Works?

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Many have had a difficult time harmonizing the writings of Paul and James. We must remember that the Bible having been given to us by the inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16) is therefore infallible (there are no contradictions or errors). Paul wrote, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of works**, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). James wrote in James 2:17, 24, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone...Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” One man referred to the writing of James as a “strawy epistle” because of his failure to harmonize these two passages. If we honestly examine these two passages, we can understand and harmonize them.

In Ephesians, Paul was speaking of God’s grace that brought salvation (Titus 2:11) in the form of the Gospel of Christ, which is based upon His death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Paul refers to the Gospel as “the faith” and said is “a gift of God: not of works...” There are two types of works mentioned in the Bible: works of merit and works of obedience. In Ephesians 2, Paul is speaking of works of merit; we cannot earn our salvation, it comes only through obedience to the Gospel (Hebrews 5:9). James, on the other hand, was referring to works of obedience. Therefore, there is no contradiction at all between Paul and James.

What is a work of obedience? On one occasion, Jesus was asked, “What shall we do, that we might **work the works of God**? Jesus answered and said unto them, **This is the work of God**, that ye **believe** on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28-29). Jesus said that faith is a work. We do not earn our salvation by our faith; but rather, we are doing what God has commanded. (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6). Repentance is also considered a work (which Jesus also commanded

– Luke 13:3). In Matthew 12:41, Jesus said “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: **because they repented** at the preaching of Jonah...” Then in Jonah 3:10, “...God saw their **works**, that they **turned from their evil way** {or repented}...” Therefore we can accurately conclude that obedience to **any** commandment given by God in His word is a work of obedience not a work of merit.

James, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote that “by works a man is justified, **and not by faith only**” (James 2:24). In several places, the Bible attributes salvation from sin to faith; however, it is a live, working faith (nowhere does it say it is by our faith **alone**). In fact, the only time the words “faith only” appears in the New Testament is in the negative: NOT by faith only.

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