

Salvation by Faith Alone or by Our Works?

We believe that salvation is by FAITH ALONE, so where do our works come into it? Are we justified by faith or by works? Some Scriptures, such as Romans 4 and James 2, SEEM to be contradictory, because they both use the terms "justified by works" - in James it says we ARE justified by our works, and in Romans it says we are NOT justified by our works. This is not a contradiction, however, because if you look at each one in its context, you will see that Romans is speaking about being justified before God, and James is speaking about being justified before men.

1.) JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD - Justified before God means that God by His GRACE **declares RIGHTEOUS** the sinner who believes on Jesus Christ. It is **NOT a process of becoming** righteous, **it is a ONE-TIME ACT of GRACE** - we, as sinful people, are MADE RIGHTEOUS the moment we accept Jesus as our Savior! It is NOT merely FORGIVENESS, although forgiveness is INCLUDED - God does indeed FORGIVE and FORGET OUR SINS. However, **JUSTIFICATION means God even FORGETS that we were ever sinners!** There is NO MORE RECORD of our sins. This kind of "justification" before God is by FAITH alone, plus nothing else. **Your works will not ADD anything to what Jesus did for you on the cross.** If you have placed your FAITH in Jesus Christ to save you, BELIEVING that He PAID for your sins on the cross, you do NOT have to work to KEEP yourself saved, because you are already completely saved, and you will never lose it or become unsaved. You cannot earn your salvation by works, and you don't have to work to keep it. The **"working out"** or outward manifestation of the salvation that is already inside you (Phil. 2:12-13), is the process of **growing to Christ-likeness** and having His image formed in you.

- **Romans 4:1-11** "What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was **justified by WORKS**, he has something of which to boast, **but not before God.** For what does the Scripture say? '**Abraham BELIEVED God**, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who WORKS, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does NOT work but BELIEVES on Him who justifies the ungodly, **his FAITH is accounted for righteousness**, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.' Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that FAITH was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who BELIEVE...."
- **II Corinthians 5:21** "For He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that **we might be MADE the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God** in Him."
- **Romans 3:24 & 28** "Being justified freely (as a gift) by His GRACE through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." "Therefore we conclude that a man is **JUSTIFIED by FAITH apart** from the deeds (works) of the **LAW.**"
- **Romans 5:15-16** "But the **FREE GIFT** is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense (Adam's sin) many died, much more **the GRACE of God**, and the GIFT by the GRACE of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many, and the GIFT is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but **the FREE GIFT** which came from many offenses **resulted in justification.**"
- **Ephesians 2:8-9** "For **by grace** you have been saved **through FAITH**, and that **NOT of yourselves** (or your works), it is **the gift of God; not of works**, lest anyone should boast."

- **Titus 3:4-7** "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, **not by works of righteousness** which we have done, but according to His mercy **He saved us**, by the washing of regeneration (being born again) and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.....having been **JUSTIFIED by His GRACE....**"

2.) JUSTIFIED BEFORE MEN - There is another kind of justification, the kind spoken of in James, and that is referring to our witness or testimony before MEN rather than before God. Our works become a testimony to others, because **REAL faith** will have good works **as a RESULT** of salvation. Someone has said, "Salvation is by faith alone, but faith that saves is not alone." Romans 4:2 says, "if Abraham was **justified by WORKS**, he has something of which to boast, **but not before God.**" Justify in this sense means "**to prove or show to be just, right or righteous.**" Abraham was "justified" in that his actions SHOWED or PROVED that he was a righteous man and a believer in God. There is a popular saying that goes, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough **evidence** to convict you?" Do people know there is something different about you now that you are a Christian, or do you act just the same as you always did? St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel always, and when necessary, use words." We are talking about the kind of witness we have before non-believers. Do they **see Christ in us**, or at least see us on our way and in the process of being changed and transformed? Philippians 2:12-13 says our salvation must be "WORKED OUT" so that it can be seen on the outside. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 that **our good WORKS would be SEEN by men**, and because of them, it would cause men to glorify God. In John 15:8, Jesus said the Father would be glorified by our producing MUCH FRUIT, which is another way to refer to our good works.

- **James 2:14-26** "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can [that] faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and **I will show you my faith by my works.** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father **justified by WORKS** when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham BELIEVED God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is **justified by WORKS**, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by WORKS when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."
- **Matthew 5:16** "Let your light so shine before MEN, that they may SEE your GOOD WORKS and glorify your Father in heaven."
- **Philippians 2:12-13** "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **WORK OUT** your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is **GOD who WORKS in you** both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

Philippians 2:12-13 is often misunderstood. Some cults and religions which teach that you can WORK YOUR WAY to heaven use this verse to prove their point. They will tell you that you need to keep the Sabbath, or some other part of the Old Testament Law, or be baptized in THEIR church only, or keep certain rules and ordinances. The Bible tells us over and over again that we are saved by GRACE through FAITH, as a FREE GIFT from God, not by the works of the law, or by performing religious ordinances, or by doing good deeds. Philippians 2:12-13 does NOT say **WORK FOR** your salvation, but rather to WORK it OUT. Once you already HAVE the salvation as a free gift from God in Jesus Christ, **your SPIRIT WITHIN YOU is born again**, and that NEW LIFE in CHRIST needs to be DEMONSTRATED ("worked out") on the **OUTSIDE**, in your daily life where people can SEE IT. The good news is that God always

gives us the power to do whatever He requires of us. **God gives us the POWER, as HE WORKS in us by His Holy Spirit**, to "WILL" (have the desire) and to "DO" (carry it out) for His good pleasure.

Baptism is one of the "works" that some religions say you must add to your faith in order to be saved, but water baptism is only SYMBOLIC of what has ALREADY happened to you when you BELIEVED on Jesus Christ as your Savior. **Going down under the water and coming up again is SYMBOLIC of your dying with Christ and being raised with Him.** Our word BAPTIZE comes from the Greek word "baptizo" which means "to be identified with" and "to be placed into." When you are baptized in water, you are making a PUBLIC IDENTIFICATION with Jesus Christ! God wants you to make that public identification, so that friends and family members will see that you are now identified with Jesus Christ, and a follower of His. In the spiritual realm, you have already been BAPTIZED into the Body of Christ, or "placed into" the Body of Christ, by the Holy Spirit the moment you believed and were born again (I Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 1:12-13).

- **Romans 6:3-5** "Or do you not know that as many of us as were **BAPTIZED into Christ Jesus** were baptized into His death? Therefore we were **BURIED with Him through baptism** into death, that just as Christ was **raised from the dead** by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in NEWNESS of LIFE."
- **I Corinthians 12:13** "For by one Spirit we were all BAPTIZED into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

"Works" in the context of James 2:14-26 means EVIDENCES that your faith in Christ is REAL. TRUE FAITH will always have corresponding action. In James 2:14-26, there is a warning to beware of those who are just "full of hot air" and show no real change in their lives or have anything to show for their supposed faith in Christ. A person who has asked God to take control of their life and Jesus to come into their heart SHOULD start acting like Jesus, even if only in small ways at first. A new Believer, of course, wouldn't have as many "works" as someone who has been saved a long time, but they should have some evidences in their life that indicate their faith is real. A hunger for God's word, a desire to please Him and obey Him whenever they find out something in their life is not right, a desire to fellowship with God's people, and a concern that friends and family members come to know Christ - all of these things are just a few of the evidences that a person should have if their faith is real. Some other Scriptures call it FRUIT (John 15:1-8, Galatians 5:22-23) rather than WORKS, but in this context they mean the same thing.

- **Galatians 5:16 & 19-25** "I say then: **Walk in the Spirit**, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the FLESH." "Now the works of the FLESH are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like..... But **the FRUIT of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have **crucified the FLESH** with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also **WALK in the Spirit.**"

Also, James 2:19 is a warning against just having "intellectual assent" rather than FAITH. James 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!" You see, just believing in the existence of God is not enough. The demons believe that Jesus is the Christ, and they know who He is. In Mark 1:23-26 and Matthew 8:28-29, the demons cried out to Jesus, "I know who You are, the Holy One of God!" Intellectual BELIEF would also be like saying, "I believe George Washington was the first president of the United States." That would be a true statement, but it isn't Biblical FAITH. Bible faith, the kind of faith necessary for salvation, means to put your whole life in God's hands, and to TRUST in Jesus with your whole heart. It also means believing that Jesus died on the cross and shed His precious BLOOD to PAY for your sins.

- **Romans 5:1 & 9** "Therefore, having been **JUSTIFIED by FAITH**, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Much more then, having now been JUSTIFIED by His **BLOOD**, we shall be **saved from WRATH** through Him."
- **Hebrews 9:14** "How much more shall **the BLOOD of Christ**, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot (without sin) to God, PURGE your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"
- **I John 1:7** "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the BLOOD of Jesus Christ** His Son CLEANSSES us from ALL SIN."
- **Romans 3:24-26** "Being **justified freely by His GRACE** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation (sacrifice) **by His BLOOD**, through faith....." (Verse 26) ".....that He might be just and the Justifier of the one who **has FAITH in JESUS**."
- **Ephesians 1:7** "In Him we have **redemption through His blood**, the **FORGIVENESS of sins**, according to the riches of His grace."
- **Colossians 1:14** "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption **through His blood**, even the **FORGIVENESS of sins**."

IN SUMMARY - What place do "good works" have in our lives? They are the PRODUCT of our salvation, and a **testimony** to unbelievers to **SHOW** them that we belong to the Lord. God also uses us, as we do "good deeds" and acts of charity (love) to help meet the **needs** of His people in the church body. We are saved by **GRACE through our FAITH** (Eph. 2:8-9), and NOT by our works or by keeping the Old Testament Law, but that does NOT give us LICENSE to SIN or to live any old way that we please. We **SHOULD** do good works and be **OBEDIENT** to what we know God wants us to do, but as Christians, we are NOT to put ourselves back under the Old Testament Law or **any other form of LEGALISM, performing RITUALS or keeping ORDINANCES**. No SYSTEM of LAWS or RULES can make a person HOLY. Being "under grace" means we are to serve God out of the **motivation of LOVE and GRATITUDE**, and **by the POWER of the HOLY SPIRIT!** In fact, Romans 13:8-10 says that "LOVE is the fulfillment of the law."

- **Ephesians 2:8-10** "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast. For **we are His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus **for (the purpose of) good works**, which God has **prepared beforehand** that we should walk in them."
- **Romans 6:15** "What then? Shall we sin because we are **NOT under LAW but under GRACE**? Certainly not!"
- **Titus 3:8 & 14** "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have BELIEVED in God should be careful to **maintain GOOD WORKS**. These things are good and profitable to men." "And let our people also learn to **maintain GOOD WORKS to meet urgent needs**, that they may not be unfruitful."
- **Romans 13:8-10** "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for **he who loves another has fulfilled the law**. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law**."
- **II Corinthians 9:12** "For the administration of this service not only **supplies the needs of the saints**, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God."
- **Titus 2:7-8** "In all things **showing yourself** to be a pattern of GOOD WORKS; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that the one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having **nothing evil** to say about you."
- **Colossians 1:10** "That you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, **being fruitful in every GOOD WORK**."