

DID PAUL AND JAMES DISAGREE?

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Many skeptics of the Bible, and those that claim to be believers in God, have debated for hundreds of years concerning Paul's and James' teaching on salvation through faith and the observance of law. Many claim that Paul taught a *faith-only* based salvation; whereas James preached a *works-only* based salvation. If that is the case, the Bible is not to be relied upon when it comes to man's eternal salvation, and it should be ignored completely. However, if there are no contradictions in the Bible (which there are none), there must be an agreement between the New Testament prophets, and the doctrine they taught.

The passages under consideration are as follows: Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:15-16; James. 1:22-25; 2:8, 14-17, 21-24. Notice the context of the whole passages, from which these verses are taken. In his letter to the Romans, Paul condemned the practice of keeping the Old Law in order to gain salvation. Since Paul taught the same thing in "every church," he was not teaching that God had not put a law into effect. (1 Cor. 4:17) Rather, it was not the law given through the prophet Moses, but it was the new law, which is the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," which law makes people free from sin (Rom. 8:2). It is still a law, nonetheless.

The whole of Romans chapter three is an acknowledgement that both Jew and Gentile are under the bondage of sin, and just because one was born a Jew did not mean he could not commit sin and did not need a remedy for those sins. Paul culminated his thoughts when he stated that the deeds of the law could not justify the faithful Jew (Rom. 3:20). Instead, the law was designed to demonstrate to the people: how bad sin, the breaking of God's laws, was; the penalty for engaging in sin; and what constituted sin. In chapter three, Paul wrote that the righteousness of God, which was revealed in Jesus, is offered to both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:21-23). He continued to say that all who have sinned could gain forgiveness and justification, even those of the past (speaking about the Old Testament people). They would be granted forgiveness through the blood of Jesus (Rom. 3:25). Those who have been the recipients of God's grace and of salvation cannot claim that their salvation came by way of the Old Law, nor by any works that were performed; instead it came by the Law of Faith (Rom. 3:27). He concluded this thought by saying that justification comes through faith without the works of the Old Law (or the works of the Patriarchal Law for that matter) (Rom. 3:28). He finished the passage by explaining that the Jew and Gentile are justified by the faith that was brought into the world by Jesus. The Law of Christ did not make void or useless the Old Law because those observances were performed by faith, and the people were forgiven in prospect of Christ's sacrifice. When the Gospel system of faith came, it produced personal faith in the individual, and salvation was, and is, the result (Rom. 1:16-17).

In his Galatian letter, Paul preached the same message. The Jew and Gentile are justified by faith and not by the works of the Old Law (Gal. 2:15-16). Law by itself cannot save anyone! Any law that is given simply acknowledges that a law can be broken, and it identifies when it is broken. However, when grace is combined with law it has the ability to save because it not only identifies when the law is broken but also demonstrates God's love and grace by the implementation of the necessary means by which sin can be forever forgiven. Under the Old Testament laws, sin was never truly forgiven (Heb. 10:4), rather it was only "overlooked" temporarily by the forbearance of God in prospect of the cross (Acts 17:30; Rom. 3:25).

James certainly agreed with Paul, he simply used different examples of the demonstration of faith. He commanded that Christians, as well as all that would be saved, were to put away the sins of the flesh and receive the Word which is able to save the soul (Js. 1:19-21). He then gave examples of what an obedient faith is, and his examples show scriptural faith to be something that translates into action (Js. 1:22). It is interesting that James described the Gospel system of faith, God's Word, as a mirror or something that shows the reader a reflection of who he truly is. He can see in the Word that he is someone that needs to accept the grace of God, which can only be accessed through the law of liberty (Js. 1:23-25). It becomes clear that the personal faith, brought about by the system of faith, is absolutely required, but also, the actions that are a result of that faith must be present in the lives of the obedient.

In chapter two, James explained that the Law of Christ does not discriminate on a personal basis between people in the way that the world discriminates. Mankind is guilty of discrimination based on economic and social standing within cultures. However, God does discriminate except on the basis of obedience to the law of Christ. When godly works are performed, the believer is fulfilling the "royal law according to scripture" (Js. 2:8). James plainly pointed to the fact that if a person simply states that he has faith but the works of God do not follow, he cannot be saved (Js. 2:14-17). James supported that doctrine even more strongly by using Abraham as an example of a working faith (Js. 2:21-24; cf Heb. 11). Although Abraham was not a Jew, God still required that he perform godly works, and he did. These works resulted in his being called "the friend of God" (Js. 2:23; cf Jn. 14:15; 15:10).

There is absolutely no contradiction between what Paul taught and what James taught. Both condemned a *works-only* based salvation, and a *faith-only* based salvation (Js. 2:16, 24). Both prophets preached a salvation that is accessed and enjoyed through a faith that produces the works of God. Paul recognized that the Old Law, or any law by itself, could not save, and James recognized that "faith alone" could not save. Salvation is there for the taking for those who combine personal faith with God's works (Rom. 6:23).