



Scriptures and Doctrine :: Justified by works or not?

Justified by works or not? - posted by Veronica226 (), on: 2010/3/11 19:54

I know the immediate answer is "no." We are justified by faith in Christ alone. I get that from these verses:

Galatians 2:16: know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 3:11: Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

And Romans 3:20-24: Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

But my question is how do these verses reconcile with James 2:20-26: You foolish man, 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 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. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 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? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

My first thought is, no one is justified by works only by faith in Christ. But our works are the out pouring of our faith and the proof of our justification.

Thoughts?

In Christ,
Veronica

Re: Justified by works or not? - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/3/11 20:15

Good question. A great way of looking at it is this way: faith alone justifies us before God, but our works justify our faith. In other words, works show that our faith was a saving faith, a faith that made a difference in our life and caused a definite change in our life. A faith that does not give birth to repentance and good works is not a saving faith, it is merely mental assent.

Re: Justified by works or not? - posted by mguldner (), on: 2010/3/11 20:20

I wrestled with this up until I came in contact with the Full Gospel of Jesus Christ. I would run into people that would utterly refuse to pray, read the bible, go to church, tithe, etc. Anytime I would point out these things in the bible as commands they would say Now you are preaching works and I am saved by Faith. I have come to this conclusion and this is how I explain it to my youth group, If I believe the boogey man lived under my bed then I would act accordingly to this ie have my wife check under my bed, act scared when laying in bed at night. Now if I believe Jesus is Lord, Saviour, and Messiah then I will act according to this belief through devotion to Him in prayer, bible reading, going to church, tithing. Essentially the Word of God says in John 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command." I am not justify myself through works but am responding to the Love of Christ through obedience. Christ Jesus died on the cross and this act was Him saying I love you, Our response of I love you too is shown through obedience and devotion to Him ie "works" because HE is worthy of prayer, devotion, and us having a striving heart to know more about Him. These are my thoughts I hope that it helps in some way.

God Bless,
Matthew

Re: Justified by works or not? - posted by hoohouu (), on: 2010/3/11 21:02

Veronica,

I used to not even read James. For the reason that I couldn't reconcile the two ideas you have presented. I think that Matthew 3:8, Luke 3:8 and Acts 26:20 are good scriptures to understand this. I think what it boils down to is an argument about the chicken or the egg. Well, the chicken (salvation) comes first, and then the egg (works). If chickens don't lay eggs they will all die off. Faith without works is dead. You don't earn your salvation through works, you earn your works through salvation. It is our works that testify of our salvation. Like someone once said, "Witness always, use words when necessary". Something to that effect anyway. Our works are what create converts and then disciples. If we do nothing but sit on our hands and never try to reach the lost, or enhance the Kingdom, we have not been imitators of Christ, who gave His life so that all might have life through Him. We earn the right to participate in His harvest, His reward, by walking in faith with Him.

So basically I just said in a thousand words what you wrote in your last sentence.

Because of Christ, Matt

Re: Justified by works or not? - posted by Areadymind (), on: 2010/3/11 23:40

James in no way stands in contradistinction to the rest of the Epistles, I was blind to this truth for a long time as a believer, but if you have eyes to see, all the epistles are very clear on these same issues. James just hits the point home harder than others.

There is perfect unity in scripture...take Ephesians 2:8-10 for example. Everyone quotes the first half, but few quote or emphasize the second half. "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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Paul is saying the exact same thing as James. James just says it more bluntly. The works, that Jesus prepared for you, not men prepared for you, are why you are saved. Salvation is for a purpose. It is a free gift, but how many people receive a gift under the tree and leave it there. "I got a gift," that person may proclaim...big wup if it just sits there unwrapped and unappropriated. Salvation is given by grace, but put to work in appropriation.

Another example is found in Romans 6:16 where Paul, not James, says "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." Who you serve is indicated in your service...if you serve the law of sin, you will be subject to its authority. Your actions and service dictate whom it is that you serve. This verse was preceded by Romans 6:14 which states that "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." So we know that we are under grace when sin has no dominion over us. (This is a work to walk in as predestined by Jesus by the way.) So what defines sin as dominion? Let us back up a bit further...Paul (not James) says in verse nine, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no dominion over him." So to the same exact degree that death, or the grave has no dominion, or corruption as David put it, over our Lord and savior, sin, under the benefit of Jesus Grace, shall have no dominion over you.

From verse one of James to the last, he is hammering this point home. The proof is in the pudding. Our verbal assertiveness that we are, "of Christ" is not determined by our will to run or to do...it is the life of Christ bursting forth from us. James is basically telling you, if the fruit is not there...you are not attached to the vine. Is this fair for me to paraphrase? Well if we go back even a couple more verses in Romans six Paul makes another shocking statement when he says that, "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Paul is not talking pie in the sky theo-theory. This is Christian reality.

So Romans, Ephesians, Corinthians, Hebrews, Jesus, Jude, James, Galatians, Thessalonians...and any other that I have failed to mention will have this message in them, just worded in a different way. Our propitiation is Christ, but the death that he died, and the fact that he was raised from the dead and ascended to the father, entitle us by faith to the life that he lived. This is the gospel message through and through. "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." "Be ye holy, as I am holy." How do we do this? Christ's resurrection power...1 Corinthians 6:14.

Keep also in mind that in the same Romans passage that Paul said in Romans 6:17, "But God be thanked, that ye were

the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." This is quite possibly the most important doctrine, which is obeyed from the heart. This doctrine of Christ's resurrection power becoming our mainstay in life. This is the gospel we receive and the gospel of newness that we continue to walk in and be "Witnesses" unto all Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the world. Our lives, based on his Resurrection power become the very witness to his death, this is why Jesus said "Blessed are those who have not seen but believe." Because we can be a witness of the resurrection through the display of faith in our lives. This is what Hebrews 11:1 means when it says that "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." I think it was Leonard Ravenhill that said well, "The world is not waiting for a new definition of Christianity, it is waiting for a new display of it." When true resurrection power is displayed through faith, the world and all Christ's enemy's can only stand with their mouths agape...he will silence all objection when he puts all things under his feet.

When I was in High School, I took Pottery class like four or five times because I enjoyed it so much. I always loved putting the glaze on the outside of a bowl or a teapot that I made, there was always a mystery as to what exactly it was going to look like when it came out. The stunning beauty of a glazed piece of pottery does not come out though until it has been heated to hundreds, no thousands of degrees Fahrenheit. Once that thing has been cooked good...the beauty is on display for all to see. The book of James is kind of like the Kiln of the New Testament. It is the forge to test the true color of any whom would call themselves a believer.

I like what Jimmy said, and I think he is right, your works justify your faith. Jesus never said that we would know his followers by their confessions or words...he said we would know them by their FRUIT. Not by their Doctrine...not by their theology...by fruit and fruit only. My old Pastor used to always say...it is faith THAT works. There is vertical Justification by the grace of God alone...there is horizontal Justification in the works that extend from the truth of the first justification. A gain this is summarized when Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. All of the law and the prophets hang on this." (I kinda paraphrased that a bit.) But it is the same concept there. Vertical love, extending horizontally to man. This is also the justification by God through grace that you can walk in the justification toward men.

I hope this was helpful. I pray Veronica this one exact thing for you that Paul prayed in Ephesians 2:15-23.

Re: - posted by Veronica226 (), on: 2010/3/12 19:19

Thank you everyone for your responses! What you all have said is basically what I believe. I was just curious to see what everyone had to say about it.

Jimmy I especially liked what you said here:

Quote:

-----faith alone justifies us before God, but our works justify our faith.

Sooo true!

Alreadymind,

Thank you so much for your explanation! It definitely made the idea that we are justified by faith but our faith is "proved" by our works more clear to me. Which is always a blessing!

Thank you all!

In Christ,
Veronica

Re: Justified by works or not? - posted by twayneb (), on: 2010/3/12 20:12

The context of James 2:20-26 is not so much about how we are justified or born again. James says (The Travis paraphrase), "You say you have faith, but I see no evidence of it, no works. I will show you my faith by the works that I do. Don't you know that if you say you have faith and have no accompanying works that you speak in vain, that it is all empty rhetoric?"

The works spoken of here are works of obedience to Christ as He leads us to step out in faith. For example, it takes no great faith to say, "God can heal you." But if the Holy Spirit says, "Go tell that man that God will heal him tonight and lay

your hands on him and pray", then we step into a totally different realm. To obey (the works James is speaking of) is to prove your faith with accompanying action.

Travis

Re: Justified by works or not? - posted by Earendel (), on: 2010/3/13 1:06

I have shared bits of this a few times before here and in other places, but every once in a while it is worth repeating.

What works is James talking about?

"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

You believe that God is one You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:14-20) What works is James talking about?

I ask again, what works?

Two individuals, one does work out of compulsion in bondage (no joy - not born again), and the other out love that the Holy Spirit brings in our hearts (much joy and full of glory...a well of living water springing up into everlasting life.) We are the recipients of mercy and grace, not of wages. The difference is being Born-Again and Phariseeism, which is the behavior of a sanctimonious and a self-righteous person. The difference between relationship and religious compulsion.

Righteousness before God has already been purchased for us. Righteous living is something that we do because we are born of the Holy Spirit, and we submit ourselves in obedience to the Holy Spirit, who by the Grace of our Father in heaven, leads us into holy living, a work not of compulsion but of love that has been birthed in our hearts.

Paul said in Philippians 3:6-8: "concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ"

The law of God requires works of righteousness, so why would Paul discard his righteousness in the law...(works in the Law) if he were so perfect in it?

Romans 3:21-22 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

How is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus work to bring righteousness anyway?

The answer is very simple actually, it is because Jesus took away ALL my sins forever, and in the absence of sin the Law is fulfilled.

So, Here is a question:

If a person were completely sin free in their life (because Jesus washed away the sins), would the righteousness or holiness that the Law of God requires be fulfilled, would we be justified by faith?

The answer is yes, because in the absence of sin the law is fulfilled!

So...if Jesus took away all of my sins after repentance and giving my life to Him, and I am blameless before God and sin

free, do I fulfill the righteousness or holiness that the law of God requires?

The answer is yes; I fulfill the righteousness that the law of God requires because I have no sin in Jesus...because Jesus took and washed away my sins and nailed them to the cross! ...I am therefore sin free before God and fulfill the righteousness that the law God requires. This is what is meant by the righteousness by faith and NOT by works!!!

So then the righteousness that the Law of God requires, is fulfilled in every single person who comes to Christ Jesus. This is what it means that Christ is the end of the law and that He fulfilled the law. This is the righteousness which is by faith, and not by the works of the Law of God.

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

How is the Law established?

The Law is established because there is no more sin to deal with, because Jesus took the sin away, and in the absence of sin the Law is Fulfilled, ...yes it is established! This is the righteousness that is by faith, and not by the works of the Law.

Romans 5: 1-2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

The very reason that Christ came into the world was so that He could free us from sin and the consequences of sin, and more than that, so that we could become a new creation in Christ Jesus. And in the absence of sin, which is through the cross of Christ, the Law is fulfilled.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (King James Version)

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.

So, with sins being removed and the way made straight, (that is to say that **Jesus made the way straight** when He took away the sins of the world) - so that the righteous requirements of God, which God made known through the giving of the Law in written statutes, are being fulfilled in us by the absence of sin, which is through the cross of Christ.

...and in the absence of sin The Holy Spirit could finally come. It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that power is given to live a consecrated life to God, not in religious compulsion but in love in the Spirit.

It is through the righteousness of God that the free gift of the Holy Spirit is given, even to us, who through obedience to the faith in Christ Jesus are made righteous by His shed blood...in that He took away our sins, and in the absence of sin the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled.

It was not until sin was removed, and the righteous requirements of the law were fulfilled (absence of sin), that the Holy Spirit could come.

For what the law could not do(written law), in that it was weak through the flesh, God (did) (by)sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (took away the sins):

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us (absence of sin through the blood of Christ), who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Romans 8:3-4 (emphasis mine)

Jesus once said:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. John 14:26

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. John 16:7

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. Luke 24:49

You see, it was necessary that Jesus went to the Father, for when He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. And it was before the very Throne of God that Christ did appear as **High Priest**, and went in to that Holy Place before the Mercy Seat, and made reconciliation between God and man.

Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Romans 8:34

When reconciliation was made complete before the Throne of God....and

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:1-4

So, I ask again...what works is James talking about?

And what about Holiness and Holy Living....hasn't the Lord said you must be Holy for I am Holy?

Holiness becomes you...

God truly wants the repentance of man, for man to make a volitional choice for Him...to openly repent before Him and to follow Him, to Call upon Him...

He wants good works towards Him based on a loving personal relationship from the heart, and not on good works based on a reliance of oneself... or in ones' ability to live holy by following a given set of rules – and yes there is a difference .

Yes, there are moral rules and guidelines to follow and understand, but they are only to instruct me in the ways of righteousness and holiness as I seek Him inwardly, and personally ...and they teach me of the nature of Jesus.

The scriptures give me an understanding of the nature of Him who has called me out of this world to be His son, to a new life in Him which is hidden in Christ Jesus - the Holy Spirit bears witness to this truth.

His good works in me (holiness) comes, not based on my own understanding of what true holiness is, but rather based on the inner workings of the Holy Spirit in my life since I accepted Him, and it is in my yielding to Him (the Holy Spirit) in all things in obedience, and not on my adherence to or on reliance of myself to seek His favour by doing good works (what I perceive as holiness). It's not what I can do, it's what He does and can do through me.

Because I love Him in the very pit of my soul, and am truly born of Him, I will seek out those things that always please Him, I will hate the things that He hates, and I will love the things that He loves...if only that I may have just one moment, just one moment in this life that I may truly glorify Him in this earthly body...and this I will do as His Holy Spirit who is within me permits, and teaches me all things.

Does this mean that I will never make a mistake and never sin again? ...no it does not. I hope that I never sin again, but if I do, I know I have an advocate with the Father who is Jesus Christ the righteous. I know that if I acknowledge my sins before God, that He is faithful and just to forgive me and to cleanse me from ALL unrighteousness.

and

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

And I dare say to anyone that I need to have works in order to be forgiven, that nothing but the precious blood of the Lamb can erase sins.

The bible teaches me that: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.
2 Corinthians 5:17

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. Galatians 6:15

Hence and therefore my salvation is not based upon me believing that my good works toward Him (personal holiness) will save me (or even merit me any favor at all), but rather on a TOTAL surrender of my life to Him, and upon a reliance on Him for my holiness and righteousness, that He who has begun a good work in me will complete it until the very day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6

I just need only to yield to Him, I just need only to yield to Him and say yes Lord Jesus, yes Lord...have your way in me and be glorified in me, let me be obedient to you through your Holy Spirit.

And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. Romans 6:13

Those who are truly born of the Spirit of God and are led by Him will indeed mortify sin in their lives, whose hearts are right with God.

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—*not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh*. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit (***because the Spirit has been given - emphasis mine***) you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. Romans 8:12-17