

Paul vs. James

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ALL Bible students know that there is a conflict between the teaching of James and Paul in regard to salvation and justification, as to whether they are obtained by works and faith, or faith alone.

James says:

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone (2:17).

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (2:26).

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works, Can faith save him? (2:14).

Paul says:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28).

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Romans 4:4-5).

For by grace are ye saved through faith; ... Not of works lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us ... (Titus 3:5).

Now if these Scriptures do not flatly contradict each other, and absolutely refuse to be reconciled or interpreted as meaning the same thing, then I fail to understand the use of language.

I am not seeking to raise a conflict between Paul and James. The conflict is already there. I am seeking the true interpretation of each, for both are divinely inspired and are written under the Holy Spirit's direction. Both are true – let us never doubt that – but why this great difference in that which is necessary to salvation?

PAUL AND JAMES CANNOT BE “RECONCILED”

It is a useless waste of time to try to harmonize such directly opposite phrases as occur above. James says faith is dead unless you have works with it. Then, to show how dead it is, he says, “For as the body is **dead** without the spirit, just so is faith without works.” Of what use is a “**dead** body”? Faith is just as useless. This admits of no other interpretation. To show the stability of his position, and how earnestly he held to his belief that he was right he asks, “If a man says he has faith, can faith save him?” James would certainly say “no!”

There are many explanations brought out to explain or harmonize this passage, such as “If a man just says he has faith, will that save him?” implying that the man may be lying, etc. I myself have heard this explanation offered. What did the eunuch say unto Philip? “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” He just said I have faith. So then this sort of explanation will not stand the test. James means something else. James says,

“Ye see then how that by **works** a man is justified, and **not** by faith only” (:24).

According to this statement no man can ever stand justified before God unless he has some works, for he says, “A man is justified by **works**, and **not** by faith alone.” Then justification is attained by *works* rather than by faith (for James). Notice the emphatic way he puts these statements. There is no possibility of harmonizing those with Paul's *faith without works*.

I know one great Bible teacher who, in trying to harmonize these statements with present truth (salvation by *faith alone*), says, “James is speaking from man's standpoint, while Paul is speaking from God's standpoint.” This explanation fails to explain anything; it is his own guess. We prefer to take God's own explanation of the whole matter, for in such a difficulty as this God does not allow any two of His inspired apostles to flatly contradict each other without having ample explanation somewhere revealed in His Word. This could not be, so let us go back and look for it.

God's Word is written to reveal Himself and the purpose which He purposed in Christ (Ephesians 3:11) first to man, then the church, then through that to all celestial intelligences in the universe (c.f. Ephesians 3:10-11; 1:10; Revelation 4:11).

Through His Word we learn that God has created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1), all for the purpose of displaying to all created intelligences His manifold wisdom and purpose in Christ (Ephesians 2:7; 3:10-11). Now consider these two, the earth and the heavens. God's manifold purpose concerns all of these spheres, to establish people and inhabit all for His eternal glory through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now the point I wish to make clear from the foregoing is that God has created these spheres for the final and eternal destiny of mankind, for in the final analogy according to His Word, we find man inhabiting each of these.

It is nowhere revealed that *all mankind* have their eternal destiny up in heaven. Neither is it revealed that earth, even the new earth, is to be the final destiny of all men. The furthest, most remote occurrence revealed in the Word of God is brought to us by Paul, and it is that final ultimate that, “*God will [at some future time] be **All in all***” (I Corinthians 15:28). Yet this furnishes no location for the “*all.*” But all is of God, and all is through God, and all is unto God (Romans 11:36).

HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY SPHERES

Now God has an earthly people, with an earthly inheritance (Israel). This people has an earthly ministry and a commission fitted to them, so as to reveal to them their earthly kingdom glories as promised them in the Scriptures of truth. The Lord Himself said to one of their rulers, “*If I have told you of **earthly** things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of **heavenly** things?*” Heavenly things are still beyond the understanding of that people of God. Let us understand that Israel is *bound up with the earth and its coming glories.*

It is not given to Israel to understand heavenly things. Therefore their teachers, leaders and those commissioned to minister to them *could not* unfold to them the heavenly “secret,” the mystery of the church, the one Body, which was hidden in God, during the run of all past ages until announced through Paul, God’s chosen vessel for that purpose.

Then why, I ask, shall we even expect James to agree with Paul, *especially* when James is writing “*to the twelve tribes*” (James 1:1) who have their inheritance on earth (Psalms 37:29), while Paul is writing to a people (*all in Christ* – Ephesians 1:3) whose inheritance is up in heaven, and not on earth at all? How could the same gospel *possibly* fit both of these peoples? It seems folly to talk about the standpoint of James being from that of man, and the standpoint of Paul being from God.

All Scripture is a revelation from God to man. If James was inspired to write that “*Faith without works is dead,*” then *to those to whom he wrote* (to the twelve tribes), faith **is dead** without works. This is what God said! Then, too, when Paul (who is also inspired) says, “*A man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law [works],*” then, *to those to whom he wrote* (all who will believe his glad message of grace) a man is justified by faith, without works. This is what God says also, and is true.

THE GOSPEL OF THE CIRCUMCISION AND OF THE UNCIRCUMCISION

Let us now consider the two gospels, the two commissions, as proclaimed by the God-appointed leaders of each of these peoples. Let us inquire, “Are they the same gospel only (as some say) given to two classes of people?” Let us see if, according to the Scriptures, they are identical. This is the vital point at issue, for herein lies the conflict between Paul and James. We know that there is a fundamental difference between Israel and the Body of Christ throughout

the Word of God, and this difference is kept inviolate and is maintained unto the end.

When James unhesitatingly says that he is writing to the “*twelve tribes*” he is saying nothing to the church which is the Body of Christ. Now, why not hold this truth just as the Holy Spirit has placed it, *to* and *for* the people to whom it was written?

How can God ever get a message through to the Hebrews if the church grabs *all*, no matter to whom it is written, for itself? This is just what they are doing, regardless of their divinely-given commission to the contrary. Without scriptural authority for our assertions all are at sea.¹ My guess is as good as anyone’s, but we want no guesswork when dealing with the Word of God. If He has not outlined the way, then better await further revelation; but if He has, then follow until death!

We know definitely that there was a commission given to Paul to proclaim *to the Gentiles*. We know just as surely that a commission was given to Peter, James, and John to proclaim *to the Jews*, and these were wrought out and given under Holy Spirit’s power and direction (Galatians 2:7-9). We know further that we have no record of the abrogation of either of these two commissions in the Word of God. Let us not make the Word of God of none effect by our traditions.

We read in Galatians 2:7 of “*the gospel of the Circumcision*” and “*the gospel of the Uncircumcision*.” Are they the same gospel? Let the Word answer.

Paul says,

I went up [to Jerusalem] by revelation and communicated unto them that gospel which I preached among the Gentiles ... (Galatians 2:2).

If this was the same gospel Peter, James and John were preaching, what was the need of explaining it to the elders at Jerusalem? It was not the same. What was it that made it necessary for the Lord to reveal to Paul that he was to go up to Jerusalem?

And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren [Paul’s converts], and said, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question (Acts 15:1-2).

Now, what was “*this question*”? It was the same question as that at the opening of this article, the same one that causes the conflict between Paul and James. Is salvation by faith, or by faith and works combined? This church at Jerusalem knew nothing of a salvation without works. So saturated with the keeping of the law of Moses were they that twenty years after Pentecost, they said to Paul,

1. “At sea” is a figure of speech meaning “in a state of confusion and disorder.” It dates from the days of sail when accurate navigational aids weren’t available. Any ship that was out of sight of land was in an uncertain position and in danger of becoming lost. – Gary Martin, *The Phrase Finder*, 1996-2009 (– editor)

*Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are that believe, and **they are all zealous of the law** (Acts 21:20).*

Now anyone should be able to see that the church at Jerusalem, these elders, Peter, James and John, were fighting bravely for a gospel of *law-works and faith combined*. Nothing else can explain their position here. Why try to warp the Scriptures out of all semblance of what they teach, and force upon them a meaning totally foreign to their intent?

Now while this was going on, Paul was contending just as manfully for his gospel of faith alone without works – without any works as an aid to salvation or justification.

Just here lies the major difficulty, and it is *fundamental*. This is why it brought on such a commotion that the Holy Spirit Himself came and laid His hand upon the men most concerned in the matter at this conference, and *gave unto each his special commission* (Galatians 2:7-9).

What was it? That Paul should go and minister to the Gentiles, while Peter, James and John should go and minister to the Jews. Notice, the Holy Spirit is careful to say that there are two gospels here, “*the gospel of the Circumcision,*” and “*the gospel of the Uncircumcision.*” It is not the gospel to each, that is, to carry the same gospel to each, but there is a gospel **OF** the *Circumcision* (which included faith and works), and there is a gospel **OF** the *Uncircumcision* (salvation by faith alone). Now Paul was to carry this latter message to the Gentiles, while the elders were to proclaim the former to the Jews. Further note this: *never* do we find a record where this was ever changed or canceled, or fused into one gospel.

Note carefully another point: Paul says he went up to Jerusalem and explained “*that gospel*” which he preached among the Gentiles. Did the Holy Spirit at the conference tell Paul that he must *change* “that” gospel of his so it would “fit” into that of the elders? Did He? Did He tell the elders to *change* their gospel to fit in with Paul’s? Did He? There is not even a hint of it. If such a change was ever to be made, here certainly is the place for it to appear – but there is none. This arrangement then is of Divine origin. Let us not,

Make the Word of God of none effect, by our traditions (Mark 7:13).

SALVATION IS BY FAITH, NOT BY FAITH AND WORKS

Therefore, henceforth we know James is proclaiming the inspired Word of God when he says, “*Faith without works is dead*” (to the twelve tribes, to whom he is writing, James 1:1), because he, and those to whom he writes, are still standing by their divinely-given commission (or rather by their original doctrine of “faith and works”) as coming out into fuller kingdom truth, as expressed also by Peter in his sermon in Acts 3:19-20.

Now, the epistle of James was, in all probability, written some twenty years before that conference at Jerusalem, and this only proves more forcibly that the gospel of the elders of the church at Jerusalem held with James exactly when they said that thousands of Jews “*believe but they are all zealous of the law.*” The *faith and works* expressed in James’s epistle is echoed in the church at Jerusalem. They are at one in their teaching. Now *this* gospel held its “right-of-way” among them just so long as God’s special favor was held open towards Israel.

Peter, one of their elders, said unto them:

Repent and be converted ... and God shall send Jesus Christ, Who was before preached unto you (Acts 3:19-20).

Yet they would not repent (Acts 4:1-3), so this condition continued on to Acts 28:28, where God's special favor towards this people ceased, and He closed the door against Israel as such, and they sank down on a level with the rest of the nations. They were then, and are still, set aside, as a nation, until the "*times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*" (Romans 11: 25).

We know as a fact that Israel, as a nation, is set aside today. Surely, then, all that pertained to them alone is as surely in abeyance also. It could not be otherwise. Paul says, "... *because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead*" (II Corinthians 5:14). Upon the same basis we will say, because we thus judge that if Israel, as such, is held in abeyance in the purpose of God today, then all that pertained to them – their king, their earthly kingdom, their kingdom gospel, their gospel of faith and works, the epistles written directly to them as such – are all just as surely held in abeyance together with them. This is why Paul and James do not agree.

One writer, who is well qualified to know, has this to say in regard to these epistles to the Dispersion:

In days not far off these epistles will appeal to Israel when to them the gospel of the kingdom is once more proclaimed. To the preachers will again be committed the "powers" of Pentecostal days, to be exercised once more as exemplified in James 5:14-15.

This we believe to be God's plan and purpose. Therefore we also judge that it is not a matter of "standpoint," either of James or Paul, but a matter of "*Thus saith the Lord.*" It is a matter of *to whom* God is speaking.

Many shelve the whole subject by saying, "Well, were they not Christian Jews to whom James wrote?" Judge for yourselves. They doubtless believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they believed that works constituted one to be righteous. If they sinned they offered sacrifices according to Moses, kept up circumcision, and were zealous of the law. This is the sort of Christians they were. This, we do not hesitate to say, is "unfinished business," when salvation by grace through faith alone is reigning. We need *no* law-works today to make us righteous in the sight of God. It would but tend to make the perfect work of Christ inefficient!

If the epistle of James was written in A.D. 45, as many commentators believe, or the year before the Jerusalem Council, which was held in about A.D. 45 or 46, then we see that James and the great church at Jerusalem held the same doctrines, proclaimed the same gospel, and held to circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses to constitute them to be righteous, or give them salvation:

For except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved (Acts 15:1).

THE “SECRET” WAS NOT “REVEALED” TO THE CIRCUMCISION

Paul’s letter to the Galatians was written in A.D. 57, or early in 58. In the first part of this epistle the apostle comes forward with the proof of his Divine authority, and the Divine source of the gospel which he received, setting forth the fact that the gospel which he proclaimed was underived from man (not of the twelve or any other man), but was a direct *revelation* from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Galatians 1:11-12).

*For I **certify** you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is **not after man**. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but [I received it] by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

What gospel was this? Was it the same as that proclaimed by the church at Jerusalem? Was it the same as James had written? Was it the same as Peter had proclaimed? If so, I ask, “Why was it necessary for Paul to have to get it by revelation from the Lord?” The only possible answer is that it was not the same gospel. Then why try to force the messages of those who are all zealous of the law, to agree with Paul’s new revelation *which excludes law*?

The teaching of the Bible, with the exception of Paul’s epistles, which relate to the Divine purpose in the heavens, follow one definite line of thought – the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, the culmination and climax of which is seen in Revelation 11:15.

The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ.

What was the distinctive feature of Paul’s gospel? There must have been some striking differences or there never would have arisen the difficulties that we find in the Word. In the latter part of Acts 20:24 we have this statement:

*... So that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which **I received of the Lord Jesus**, to testify, or preach, the gospel of **the grace of God**.*

Let us place other Scripture alongside of that:

*That the Gentiles should be joint-heirs, and of the same joint-body, and joint-partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel whereof I [not the twelve] was made a minister, according to the gift of His grace given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I [I alone, not Peter, James nor John] should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; [unsearchable riches are riches that have never before been searched out, or revealed. What are they? Listen:] and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the **mystery** which from the **beginning of the ages hath been hid in God** (Eph.3:6-9).*

*Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body’s sake, which is the church: whereof I [myself alone] am made a minister, according to the administration of God which was given to me for you, to fill out the Word of God: Even the **mystery** which hath been hid from the ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make*

known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:24-27).

Wonderful Word of God! Are the unsearchable riches in Christ circumcision and law-keeping? Is the “mystery” that was “hidden in God through all past ages,” seen in the epistle of James? Do you find it revealed in the church at Jerusalem? Do Peter, James or John have a single word to say or write concerning it? If they do, then it was never “kept secret” (Romans 16:25) until after Paul’s conversion.

The epistles of the elders of the church at Jerusalem have no place in the dispensation of the mystery. Why should they? They are definitely written to and concerning another people altogether, and their writers admit the same. God’s Word teaches us that Paul was God’s chosen vessel to unfold the “mystery” unto the Gentile nations. Why should we struggle, fight and fume to have all the other writers declare the same thing, when from the very beginning it was held separate? What is the use of Paul’s writings if Peter, James and John wrote the same things to the same peoples?

What is the use of God having a people who were chosen from *before* the foundation of the world, a people with a *heavenly destiny* (Ephesians 1:3-4), and also having a people who have a kingdom prepared for them *from* (or since) the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34), a people with an *earthly destiny*, if the church of today is to absorb everything? James does *not* agree with Paul, and there is a reason. It was never intended that he should.

Let us leave some of God’s writings for those that shall come after the Body of Christ is caught away. The Body of Christ will be with Him in glory – praise His name! – but there will be many millions of people left on the earth. What Scriptures will they look to in that dread era? God will write no new book for them – they will have to find their solace in the one we now have. The Dispersion Epistles (James through Revelation) which will then be in effect, will be revitalized by Holy Spirit power, and will fill up the Word of God for Israel in deed and in truth.

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