

Reconciling James and Paul (Romans 3 & 4)



Some critics of the Bible say that, because Paul teaches justification by faith and not works, and James teaches justification by works, the Bible contradicts itself.

Paul's argument is dealing with justification by faith as opposed to justification by the Law of Moses. It is by God's grace that man is justified; it cannot be earned by man (Rom 3:20-24,28; Eph 2:8-9).

James is concerned with showing that a saving faith is one that lives. Its works are the works of faith, not the works of Law. James does not say that faith is not necessary, but that a man cannot be justified by faith ALONE (cp Jam 2:17). See Gal 2:16,20 - we have to believe but we also need to LIVE by the FAITH (cp Gal 3:11).

They each deal with the two stages of justification - by faith and by works -

1. As a sinner, Abraham was justified from his past sins when his faith was counted for righteousness (Rom 4:2-5).
2. As a saint he was justified by works when he offered up Isaac on the altar (Jam 2:21-23).

“Abraham was the subject of a twofold justification, as it were; first, of a *justification by faith*; secondly, of a *justification by works*. Paul says he was justified by faith; and James, that he was justified by works. They are both right. As a sinner he was justified from his *past sins* when his faith was counted to him for righteousness; and as a saint, he was justified by works when he offered up Isaac. Of his justification as a saint James writes, “Abraham our father was justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar. Faith wrought with his works, and *by works was faith made perfect*. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and NOT *by faith alone*” (Jam 2:21-24).

I have termed it a twofold justification by way of illustration but it is, in fact, only one. The two stand related as cause and effect; faith being the motive principle it is a justification which *begins* with the remission of sins that are past, and is *perfected* in obedience unto death. The idea may be simplified thus. No exaltation without probation. If a man believe and obey the gospel *his past sins* are forgiven him in Christ; but, if after this he walks in the course of the world his faith is proved to be dead, and he forfeits his title to eternal life. But if, on the other hand, a man become an adopted son of Abraham, and “by a patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and incorruptibility” (Rom 2:7), he will find everlasting life in the Paradise of God” (*Elpis Israel*, Pg 278-279).

Abraham's faith of Gen 15 was of the genuine saving quality that would manifest itself in works; the obedience of Gen 22 proceeded directly from this living faith and is its fruits.