

In **Ephesians 2:8, 9** Paul writes, "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." Then in **James 2:24** James writes, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."

In the first passage you have Paul saying we are saved by grace and not by any works. In the second passage James says that one is justified by works and not by faith only. Some believe that Paul and James contradict one another.

The famous German Reformer, Martin Luther having established his doctrine of salvation by faith only, concluded that James was not an inspired book and should be removed from the N.T. He called it an epistle of straw. But even Luther's followers rejected his conclusion about James.

Men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit would not contradict each other. Inspiration would prevent such happening. Paul says that "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*" Thus, for many years men have been trying to harmonize these two passages.

Grace can be defined as the unmerited or undeserved favor of God. There is no way we can demand salvation from God regardless of how many good works we may engage in. There is no way I can earn my salvation by excelling in good works. However, at this point it is well to keep in mind that Paul uses the word "*works*" in this passage in reference to the system of works under the Law of Moses.

Our lives at best are imperfect. This is the reason why we need God's grace. Paul declares in **Romans 3:23**, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" This is even true of all Christians. John writing to Christians said, "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" (1 John 1:8).

Some however, have become careless with grace, even cheapening it. We are thinking of the doctrine "*once in grace, always in grace,*" or the "*impossibility of apostasy.*"

The concept behind this doctrine is that once you become a Christian you can never sin so as to be lost. Paul in his day was already experiencing this kind of thinking. He wrote, "*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 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*" (Romans 6:1-4).

Paul's conclusion is that we must as Christians leave behind us the old sinful ways and begin to walk in newness of life.

We cannot say, "Thank you Lord for saving me but I will live as I please because I know I cannot fall from grace." What an insult this would be to God, his grace, mercy, long-suffering and boundless unconditional love.

Paul made it very plain that one can fall from grace after becoming a Christian. He said some of the Galatian Christians had wanted to return to the Law of Moses. He rebuked them in these words, "*You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*" (Galatians 5:4).

God's grace is not a cheap grace. It cost the Son of God His life. It also costs us something too. God's grace opened a well of water for Hagar, but she had to work or she would have thirsted to death. "*She went, and filled the bottle with water*" (Genesis 21:19). God's grace parted the waters of the Red Sea but the Israelites would not have been delivered from the Egyptians had they not walked across the bed of the sea where the water had been parted. Yet all of them could have sung, "*By grace are we saved through faith, and that not ourselves; not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

If one is saved by grace alone, then nobody would be lost, for by the grace of God, Jesus died for every man. Hebrews 2:9 says, "*He by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.*" The "everyone" of this passage is not just any and every person but those who do his will. Again God's grace is not cheap!

The entire second half of the second chapter of James speaks of faith and works. However, James is not writing about works of merit whereby we earn our salvation. James is elaborating on the nature of the Christian's faith. Genuine faith will demonstrate itself in good works.

Genuine faith cannot be restrained, it cannot be held down. Genuine faith is always on the go. It is active and obedient. James' point is that genuine faith will demonstrate itself in good works of service to God and others.

James argues, how can you say you have faith and yet you have no works to show for it? There are people like this. They are quick to give mental consent to the historical fact of Jesus and who He was, but their faith is never great enough to move them to do anything about that fact.

James says, "*You believe that there is one God. You do well, even the demons believe—and tremble!*"

## Demons have this kind of faith but what good is it to them?

Faith must be more than a passive faith. Passive faith is totally rejected by God. On the other hand works of Christian service are proof that our faith is genuine. Good works are the result of God's grace. They come about out of our love and appreciation for what the Lord had done for us.

Paul says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Paul in Titus 2:11, 12 wrote, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age."

This takes a great deal of effort on the part of the Christian. To the Philippians Paul wrote, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Again faith requires effort on our part. It is by the grace of God that He enables us to do good works. Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

James gives Abraham as an example of faith in action (James 2:21-23). He would have offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice but God prevented it at the last moment. God commended Abraham for his obedient faith.

He said, "For now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Genesis 22:12). Over and over again James reiterates the truth that "Faith without works is dead." A faith that will not act is simply a "dead faith" according to James.

He climaxes his argument by saying, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (2:24). Earlier in chapter one James says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (1:22).

The mistake Martin Luther made in his mishandling of the book of James was his assumption James was teaching meritorious works such as was practiced in the Catholic church in the Middle Ages. The problem in his day was penance.

If a person sinned he had to go and confess it to a priest. In turn he had to pay a penalty—so many prayers, genuflections, fasting, pilgrimages, vigils, giving money, etc. By doing such meritorious works one could earn his way out of condemnation.

By the same token one could also release a relative or friend out of purgatory. James is not teaching meritorious works. He is teaching good works of service to God and others. However such works are nothing we can boast about or rave over.

Jesus said, *"So likewise you, when you have done all those things which are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'"*(Luke 17:10).

Isaiah wrote long ago, *"And all our righteousness are like filthy rags"*(Isaiah 64:6). However, good works must be evident or else we have proven to God that our faith is insufficient and dead. God will not, He cannot, accept dead faith.

Paul and James do not contradict each other. We are saved by God's grace which is unmerited, undeserved. Paul says, it is *"through faith."* James adds it must be through a genuine active faith.

How is your faith? Will you act upon it by repenting of your sins? (Acts 17:30), confessing Jesus as God's Son (Acts 8:37) and being baptized for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38)?

Baptism is not a work but an essential act of faith which puts us under the blood of Christ, which we do not deserve.