

# ***FAITH AND WORKS***



A careful examination of what the Bible says about  
the relationship between faith and works

**Johnny Giesbrecht**

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For many years I have felt strongly that books and articles with the main purpose of presenting spiritual Christian teaching should not be sold but rather given free of charge to the reader. I still believe that. Therefore I am making my book called **FAITH AND WORKS** available for free to anyone who wishes to read it online or to download it as a PDF file.

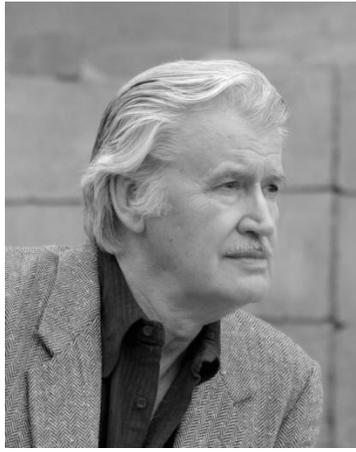
Johnny Giesbrecht

What **FAITH AND WORKS** is about

If you're a Christian, have you ever struggled with the matter of the relationship between faith and works as presented in the Holy Bible? Perhaps you know that salvation is a free gift from God, but some of the Scripture verses about doing good and refraining from sin, in connection with salvation, seem confusing and contradictory to you.

This book is meant to help the reader to understand these matters and to find peace about them.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Johnny Giesbrecht writes fiction and non-fiction. Two of his young adult novels were published by Moody Press of Chicago. He now has books available as e-books at Kindle Books at Amazon.com.

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To **ELMER REIMER**,  
a highly positive influence in my life  
when we were both boys;  
for he was, even at that young age,  
a beacon directing people to faith in Christ.

# **FAITH AND WORKS**

## **FOREWORD**

IT IS MY PRAYER that the Lord will use this small book in a big way--to help those who have been struggling with the matter of the relationship between faith and works as presented in the Bible. Maybe you know that salvation is a free gift from God, but some of the Scripture verses about doing good and refraining from sin, in connection with salvation, seem confusing and contradictory to you.

Read this book prayerfully; that's the way I wrote it. However, I'm not infallible. If I've unknowingly wandered away from the truth anywhere in the following pages, I pray that God's Holy Spirit will guide you to detect that error, and that you will eventually find God's truth in the matter. Whoever sincerely seeks for truth with an honest heart will find it--of this I'm completely sure.

All Bible quotations are from *The New International Version* unless otherwise credited within the script.

Johnny Giesbrecht

## **CHAPTER ONE --- THE PROBLEMS**

THERE ARE SEVERAL PROBLEMS regarding the matter of faith and works. Many Christians have found the answers; some others, although they have accepted God's way of salvation, are not completely clear on parts of the Holy Scriptures that deal with faith and works and their relationship to each other.

One result is that they have less power in telling others the good news about Jesus. We are sometimes challenged by having unbelievers throw difficult questions at us, and do not always have ready and good solutions to offer. The purpose of this book is to untangle this often confused matter of the faith-works relationship. My intention is to do this with the help and guidance of God's Holy Spirit, making much use of the Scriptures.

Let's take a look at the basic problems. There's more than one difficulty, but the underlying question, one that has seen much controversy throughout the history of the church, is this: Are we saved through faith, works, or both? In Ephesians 2:8, 9 Paul tells us, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast." At the same time James 2:24 tells us: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." A contradiction? No. In the pages ahead we'll look at this particular matter very carefully.

There are many who use parts of the letter of James, and somewhat similar verses found elsewhere in the Bible, to uphold their belief that we are saved by works as well as by grace through faith. As a member of the Watchtower organization once pointed out his belief to me, the train to Heaven had been provided by the grace of God, but you still need to earn your ticket by good works before you're allowed to get on. Some more mainstream denominations also hold to this belief or a similar one. They say that Christ opened the way to Heaven, but we still have to work our way in. But there are big problems involved with this stance. Romans 3:23-25a tells us: "... 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. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." If, as this part of the Scripture states, we are "... justified freely by his grace ..." then where is the necessity of works on our part? No mention is made of it here.

The evangelical, fundamentalist doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, apart from works, gives a clear explanation of what Christ has done for us on the cross: He suffered and died to pay the penalty for the individual sins and sinfulness of each one of us, as is expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where it speaks about Jesus: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This is called the doctrine of

atonement, and, although it is far too wonderful for any of us to fully comprehend, in a way it is simple. Jesus took our place; he satisfied the justice of God by suffering in our place. And this was, of course, really God himself suffering for us, for "... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ..." (2 Corinthians 5:19) Those who talk about Jesus opening the way to Heaven, so that we can work our way in, do not seem to have any clear idea of how Jesus did this. If it were a limited matter of doing away with the original sin of Adam and Eve, as I believe some suggest, then why does 1 John 2:2 tell us the following about Jesus?: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

But if we are saved by grace through faith, apart from works, maybe we'll have people saying: "I'm saved by grace so I can live in sin and do anything I want to." That's a horrible thought, but this is an argument very often used by those who believe in salvation through both faith and works.

Are there really people who say that because they're saved by grace through faith they can live in sin, and then willfully proceed to live that way? Probably. If so, what does this do to the evangelistic-fundamentalist doctrine of salvation being a free gift, apart from works?-- particularly since 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 tells us: "Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." Yes, there are problems.

What is faith? What are works? Most Christians probably understand the meanings well enough; nevertheless, it will be good to briefly take a close look at both of these words.

FAITH: When asked to give a definition of faith, many believers quote Hebrews 11:1. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (KJV) The *King James Version* is one of the greatest of all English Bibles, maybe the very greatest, but for we who live in the twenty-first century, this approximately 400 year old translation is in many places hard to grasp. The above passage is a good example. After having read the same verse in seven other translations, I find that they agree rather nicely and that the *Revised Standard Version* and the *New American Standard* perhaps best express this meaning, both using exactly the same wording: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

This certainly is an important Bible verse in regard to finding out what the word *faith* means, but it was never intended to be a completely encompassing definition. The writer was simply telling us *something* about faith. A little further on, in verse six of the same chapter, he says: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Verse one tells us that faith is an experience of assurance and conviction about things to come and things not yet seen; verse six adds that faith is believing that God exists, and trusting that God will reward those who seek him. The two verses are somewhat the same, but Verse six brings the blurry picture of Verse 1 into focus, God himself being the focal point. Faith, then, is believing God. Verse seven clarifies this even more, letting us know that faith is not only believing that God exists, and that he is to be trusted to reward those who seek him, but that faith is also believing anything that God tells us: "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family."

Verses 17-19 tell us that faith is believing in God's trustworthiness concerning his promises, and also believing in God's power to do miracles: "By faith Abraham, when God

tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘Through Isaac shall your promised offspring come.’ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” For, as we know, God did not permit Isaac to go through with the sacrifice; it was only a test, and a very hard one.

The rest of Hebrews 11 continues these same thoughts, telling us by examples from Biblical history that faith is believing in God, believing what God tells us, trusting in his goodness, trusting in his power. Verses 32 to 35 tell us about some of the amazing *results* that have been brought about through faith, and from the last part of Verse 35 to Verse 38 we are told how people of faith are persecuted by the people of the world who do not have faith.

One more important point, strongly implied throughout Hebrews 11, must be brought to attention in regard to faith. In James 2:19 we read: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” It is not enough to believe that God exists. Even believing what he says can fall far short of the mark. The demons, after thousands of years of experience in their rebellion against God, must very often--if not always--believe God when he speaks. It is also not enough to believe that God has great power and can do mighty miracles. Again, the demons know about this, but simply knowing it to be a fact does not make any big difference. “... the devils also believe, and tremble.” What is missing? The devils--in modern English versions translated as *demons*--are not surrendered to God in their minds and hearts. They are enemies of God. True faith, the kind that is alive and well and has meaning, must go hand in hand with the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37)

To sum up, then, I must conclude that faith is: believing that God exists, being surrendered to him in love, believing that he will keep his promises to us, believing everything else he tells us, and believing in his infinite power and everything else about himself that he reveals to us. It is not really all that difficult, and when a Christian says, “I believe in God,” or “I have faith in God,” Christians and non-Christians alike usually know what is meant by that statement. But it is good to take a closer look at it once in a while, particularly just before embarking on a study of the relationship between faith and works.

I wish to say a little more about faith, this in regard to what it is based on and how we come about having it, when we do; but because this is a very deep and important subject I’ll touch on it only briefly now. Hopefully I’ll have opportunity to go into it in depth in another volume.

Many have the mistaken notion that faith is blindly believing something without having any good reason for doing so. Others say that all true faith should be based on solid evidence and that we cannot rightly believe anything unless it has been proven in such a way that our minds can understand it. The second concept is just as false as the first. It is foolish to believe anything without having a good reason for doing so, but it is just as foolish to think that our finite minds, with which we can’t even understand ourselves, can ever gather enough evidence out of God’s immense universe to conclusively prove anything. Even more preposterous is the idea that our puny little brains can surround the infinite, eternal God, take a good look at him, and decide that we understand him.

Human reasoning has its place and is useful when kept in line, but fortunately there is a different way to find conclusive answers. If it is important for us to believe God, and if reasoning and scientific evidence fall far short--because of our limited minds--of giving assurance in regard to the existence of God or any message from God to us, wouldn’t it be

contrary to God's heart of love to leave us floundering about without a hope of ever knowing anything with absolute certainty?--particularly since such great principles and issues of love, worship, obedience, and eternal welfare are involved.

The Bible teaches that God has a way of communicating with us that transcends puny human reasoning and allows us complete assurance. Jesus spoke of this when he said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27) Elijah recognized the "gentle whisper" of God's guidance. (1 Kings 19:12b) Philip had no problem with this concept when he obeyed God's instructions to "Go to that chariot and stay near it." (Acts 8:29) And as a result Philip was able to tell the good news about Jesus to the chief treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia. What is this guidance? It is the voice of the Holy Spirit--the Teacher, the Comforter. It is not a voice heard with the ears, but a "voice" heard with the heart.

You say the Bible is the only guide you trust? How would you know that the Bible is God's word if the Holy Spirit of the living God had not helped you to believe that this is so? We have to start at the starting point--God's Spirit touching our own spirits with a touch that is unmistakably God. But it will be unmistakable only when we are totally truthful in our hearts. It is mankind's fallen nature to be dishonest, and so this is where the confusion comes in; but the more honest and truth seeking we become, with the help of God, the more distinctly we hear his "voice" and know who he is: "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10b) And that is what faith is all about.

**WORKS:** This word in the Bible presents little problem so far as its meaning goes. The words *work* and *works* are used in a few different ways, but these ways are all closely related. There is work in the sense of a person earning his living and providing for his family: "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work ..." (Exodus 20:9 KJV) A work can also be any kind of doing, either good or bad, on the part of an individual: "For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:14 KJV) Thirdly, works often refer specifically to doing any kind of good thing--anything which will please God and bring happiness to our fellowman: "Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share ..." (1 Timothy 6:18 NAS) The Bible also tells us much about God's own wonderful works in all of creation, and most miraculously in the hearts of believers.

As we consider the subject of this book we will think of the word *works* in the sense of doing good things, for it is in this sense that *works* is closely related to *faith* in the framework of the problems we will look at.

## CHAPTER TWO -- DIFFICULT SCRIPTURES AND OMISSIONS

THE BIBLE has much to tell us about the importance, and even the necessity, of living a good life. I doubt if anyone has ever tried to list all the Scripture verses that admonish, warn, and encourage us to be good. I'm not going to try that, but I will quote some of the Scripture parts that present the doing of good in connection with salvation; for this is the problem with which we are dealing. It is Bible portions such as these that are often put forward as proof that salvation comes to us as a result of our good works, or at least partly as a result of our good works. I will not attempt to list them all, but hopefully I will find and quote the main ones--that is, the verses about good works that are the most definitely connected to salvation. We will look carefully at these, and then, unless someone should come up with new evidence to the contrary, we will feel safe in assuming that the insight we have applied to these major "works verses" will be sufficient to settle the problem regarding faith, works, and salvation. In other words, we will be applying a broad principle to the problem, which can later be applied by anyone to other "works verses" which I have not specifically quoted.

Here, then, is a list of those parts of Scripture which I consider to be the most used in an attempt to support the doctrine of salvation by works or partly by works. Do not be surprised that they are very convincing in that regard; there is a good reason for this. Keep in mind also, as you read them, that Romans 6:23 tells us: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul is here contrasting wages, which are earned, with a gift which is not earned but given freely. And the Bible does not contradict itself.

*Matthew 7:21:* "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

*1 Corinthians 6:9, 10:* "Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

*Revelation 21:7, 8:* "He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

*Revelation 22:12:* "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."

*Revelation 20:12:* "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books."

*James 2:24*: “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” This statement by James is from a well-known part of the Bible that tells a lot about faith and works. The complete section is *James 2:14-26*, and we will study all of it when we come to this second-last item in my list.

*Philippians 2:12*: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling....”

Now, to the above list of positive statements from the Scriptures I will add two points which are sometimes put forward by those who do not believe that salvation is entirely a free gift through the atoning sacrifice made by Christ on the cross. These two points are not in the form of Biblical quotes, but rather in the form of what some claim are omissions from the Bible.

The first claim is that the *Gospel According to Mark* does not include, or perhaps does not emphasize, the doctrine of sacrificial atonement.

The second point is that when Peter preached the first Christian sermon after the ascension, immediately following the Pentecost experience (Acts 2), he did not preach about the sacrificial atoning work of Christ.

Both of these two points are used by some who believe that salvation comes entirely or partly through good works, so I will deal with these matters first, and then study the works-and-salvation verses already listed.

*Claim One: The Gospel According to Mark does not include, or at least does not emphasize, the doctrine of sacrificial atonement.* To start with, we must take into consideration who it is who makes this claim to use as an argument, and what “Christian” movement they belong to, for this will help us to understand their reasoning. The argument is used by liberals and those following the so-called neo-orthodoxy movement, the latter being a newer form of liberalism and just as heretical as the first. One of the points that sets these people apart from genuine followers of Christ is that many liberal leaders do not accept the inerrancy and authority of the Scriptures. Giddy with “higher criticism” studies, their professor-titled egos become more and more inflated. Their writings bulge at the seams with huge words and long, involved sentences as they spend their days energetically trying to discredit God’s holy written word, the Bible. They look at the Bible as having come only out of the minds of humans, without divine inspiration, and this puts a very different color on their method of gleaning wisdom from its pages--which they claim to do. I will show you how this applies to the matter in question concerning that particular part of the book of Mark.

If one does not believe that the Bible is God’s infallible word, then one can no longer think of it as a unit being all in one piece yet with its various parts having various purposes. Instead one must then think of it as a collection of writings by various men, writings which were put together in one volume solely at the discretion of other men; and since all of the writers were men of God we might expect that the separate works of each one of them would express the main doctrines of Christianity as they understood it. So a liberal professor reads the book of Mark and decides that Mark could not have believed in the sacrificial atonement, because if he had he would have said something more definite about it. After all, this book (the Book of Mark) was Mark’s big statement about Christianity, wasn’t it?

Those who accept the whole Bible as being God’s inspired word, however, look at the matter from an entirely different viewpoint. If one person, God, is the author of the whole Bible, then we should not think that he would find it necessary that each book or section of the Scriptures should contain information on every subject he wants to make known to us. Rather

we would expect that the Bible as a whole would cover the ground and teach us the things God wants us to know. We would expect some repetition, for the sake of emphasis and to allow us to look at a piece of knowledge from various angles, but a doctrine presented in one book of the Bible and omitted from another would not cause us any problem. And if we believe that the Bible really is God's book, then the lack of emphasis on the doctrine of atonement in Mark will not disturb us; rather we will be concerned about finding out what God *is* trying to tell us through Mark. This concept of the Bible being God's book, with many parts for many purposes, can be used to refute other omission claims of the liberals.

Now that we've had a look at how the overall matter should be viewed, I must point out that although the sacrificial atonement doctrine is not emphasized in Mark, yet it is clearly stated in at least one place in that book--and that in itself would be enough to destroy the argument that the liberals have about this matter. What sense is there in saying that the tenet of atonement is not true because Mark does not talk much about it, if, in fact, his writing records a concrete statement about this very doctrine. In Mark 10:45 we read that Jesus said: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Whatever else they say about the book of Mark, the liberals will have a hard time to twist this particular verse out of shape. The word *ransom* is a good choice for translation, for the corresponding Greek word used in this verse means *a redemption price*. We have here a very clear expression, from the lips of Jesus himself, of the sacrificial atonement doctrine.

*Claim Two: When Peter preached the Pentecost sermon he did not preach about the sacrificial atonement of Christ.* We are told about Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-41. As you read through this section you will find that indeed there are no recorded words of Peter expounding on the atonement. He speaks, first of all, about the Holy Spirit, for he and the other disciples had just received their initial filling of the Spirit's power and were causing quite a stir by simultaneously speaking about God's love in many languages. Please note that we are not told what these other disciples actually preached, only that the amazed hearers said, "... we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:11) This in itself leaves plenty of room for the doctrine of atonement to have been preached. Nevertheless, we can ask, "But why wasn't it recorded in this particular part of Acts?"

The same principle that we applied to Mark applies here: God is the author of the whole Bible; there is no reason why we should expect him to always put equal emphasis on all points throughout all parts of the Bible. Yet we could expect the atonement to be brought out clearly in the record here, for this was the first evangelistic meeting; and that, of course, is the strong point of the liberals in this matter. But do take note that there is nothing conclusive about their stand; there is no solid evidence to even suggest that the atonement was not preached. Rather there is evidence that if it was preached, it was not recorded.

After talking about the Holy Spirit, Peter goes on to tell the crowd that Jesus was accredited by God through signs, wonders, and miracles. Then, in Verse 23, Peter makes a statement that refers to the atonement, but because he does not spell it out, the liberals are left free to misinterpret it to their own liking. Peter, talking about Jesus, says, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Notice that the leader of the apostles is calling attention to the fact that God not only knew that Jesus was going to die on the cross but that he purposed it. In other words, God sent his Son into the world for the express purpose of suffering and dying on a cross. This much of Peter's message involving the death of Christ is recorded,

but to find out more about why this happened and what it means to us, we have to go to other parts of God's book.

A little further on in the same sermon, in verses 34 and 35, Peter quotes a prophesy from *Psalm 110*: "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." Psalm 110 is very short, only seven verses. It is unlikely that Peter knew only about the first verse, which is recorded as having been quoted by him. It is reasonable to expect that he knew and believed the other six verses too, which include verse 4: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." (KJV) If we believe in an integrated Bible inspired by God, then there is no harm in turning to the book of Hebrews where we find a detailed discourse on this very prophesy. Hebrews 4:14 to 10:18 covers the matter, and if you read it all you will see that Jesus, after the order of Melchizedek, is the great high priest who takes away our sin by the sacrificial offering of himself. You should read it all, and many times, but I will quote some key passages from this section. I wish to show the connection: Peter, in his Pentecost evangelistic message, is quoting from Psalm 110; he only quotes the first verse, but two verses further on is the prophesy that Jesus is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Turning to that part of the Bible which expounds this prophecy, we find the following statements:

Hebrews 5:6 (God speaking to Jesus): "You are a priest forever, just like Melchizedek."

Hebrews 5:9, 10 (about Jesus): "... and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest, just like Melchizedek."

Hebrews 6:20: "... where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, just like Melchizedek."

Hebrews 7:17: "For it is declared: 'You are a priest forever, just like Melchizedek.'"

The above four passages affirm that the writer of Hebrews, in expounding part of the same psalm from which Peter was quoting, is saying that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of the prophesy of that psalm. As we continue to read in Hebrews, we find the following about this great high priest, Jesus:

Hebrews 7:27: "Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."

Hebrews 9:12: "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."

Hebrews 9:15: "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."

Hebrews 9:28: "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

Hebrews 10:10: "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Hebrews 10:12: "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."

Hebrews 10:14: "... because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."

The above quotes strongly proclaim the doctrine of sacrificial atonement. And when Peter was quoting from Psalm 110 he was talking about the same Christ that the writer of Hebrews--also quoting some from Psalm 110--was talking about. Only someone who does not believe in the Bible as an integrated unit would attempt to use Peter's Pentecost sermon as evidence against the doctrine of sacrificial atonement.

As a less important point I would like to call attention to the fact that the writer of Acts clearly states that not all of Peter's Pentecost message has been put down in writing. Acts 2:40: "And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" (NAS)

Even though the recorded part of Peter's Pentecost message did not explain atonement, yet there is firm evidence in his own writings that he did accept and teach that all-important doctrine. We find the following three statements in his first letter:

1 Peter 1:18, 19: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

1 Peter 2:24: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

1 Peter 3:18a: "For Christ died for your sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

It may seem that I've been digressing somewhat from my subject of the relationship between faith and works, but this is not the case. The doctrine of sacrificial atonement is a doctrine of salvation by the grace of God through faith; and at least one segment of those who try to disprove the doctrine of atonement are of the same kind who believe in one form or another of salvation by works.

Having gotten the two omission claims out of the way, we will now look at the more difficult matter of the work-and-salvation Scriptures which I have already listed.

## CHAPTER THREE --- THE KEYS

I WILL ITERATE THE PROBLEMS: Are we saved by grace through faith apart from works, or are we saved completely or partly by works? If we are saved at least partly by works, then what is the meaning of Scriptures such as Ephesians 2:8, 9?--“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.” But if we are saved entirely by grace through faith, apart from works, then what is the meaning of Scriptures such as Matthew 7:21?--“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Also, if people can be saved by grace alone through simple faith, won’t those who are saved have a tendency to refrain from good works and live in sin instead, since they believe that no matter what they do they will still be saved?

We have now arrived at what I consider to be the most important part of this book. I wish to point out to you certain key Scripture passages which can effectively unlock the answers to the above problems.

The first is the well known 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Obviously, Paul is talking about a sudden and definite change rather than a gradual process. There’s plenty of gradual process involved in the Christian life, but the above verse cannot in any way be taken as a description of day-by-day spiritual growth in the life of a believer. Then what does the verse mean? It refers to the very same experience that Jesus was talking about when he told Nicodemus: “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3) Evangelicals and fundamentalists are familiar with this thought, and as they read this they’re thinking that I’m not really telling them anything they don’t already know. But in dealing with the problems I have already stated, it is necessary to take a close look at some of the most basic Christian doctrines and the Scripture verses that uphold them. We can then use these, fitted together in the right way, to untangle the seeming contradictions regarding faith and works. The born-again concept, as revealed by Jesus, is one of these important pieces of the puzzle.

Birth is not a very gradual process; in fact, it is a relatively abrupt happening. Pregnancy is gradual, and once the child is born its growth into adulthood is gradual, but the actual birth is a relatively sudden transfer from the world of the womb to the world of people. The Master of parables and illustrations did not make any error when he used the words, *born again*, or *born anew*, or *born from above*, to refer to the transfer of a soul from its lost state into God’s family.

There is a pregnancy involved in this spiritual realm too, and before that a conception. The conception is hearing the gospel. The pregnancy is that period of time, whether long or short, that elapses between the time that the gospel message has been heard for the first time and

the time when the hearer fully accepts Christ as Savior. At this point the birth occurs. After that the child of God must grow, day after day, with the goal of this growth being spiritual maturity. To complete this explanation of the illustration I should add that a miscarriage is possible during the time of pregnancy. But the point I want to make here is that the actual birth of a soul into God's family is relatively abrupt and altogether miraculous. If it were not this way, then Christ would have used a different illustration; if it were not miraculous, then Paul would not have said: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I want to emphasize that being *born again* is *not* a matter of seeing Christ as our great example, listening to him as our great teacher, and then changing our own lives to conform with the example and teachings that he has presented to us. A child in the womb is not yet in a very good position to follow in his father's or mother's footsteps. In a sense we could say that all not-yet-born babies try to do so, for they often kick and move their legs around; and if the father is called over to take notice of this, he puts his hand over the womb area and is delighted at the valiant efforts. But that's as far as it goes. No, birth is not what the child does. Whether physical or spiritual, birth is a miraculous event. In both cases, God is the only one who can design and cause to function this remarkable transformation.

What happens when a human being experiences the new birth? There are Bible passages that tell us quite a lot about it, so let's look at three of them.

Colossians 2:13: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ." The emphasis here is that the new birth is a receiving of life. All life comes from God. One touch of God's hand and you're filled with a brand new flood of spiritual life that will keep flowing through you for all eternity.

Hebrews 9:13, 14: "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God." The emphasis here is on a cleansing and on a miraculous transformation. The born-again person acquires a great desire to serve God.

1 Peter 1:23: "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." This verse emphasizes the fact that the new life given to us when we are born again is a life that lasts forever--it's imperishable. But note that this is not a matter of God dealing with someone by causing whatever life he already has to last forever. Instead, it's a matter of God injecting something new into a person, namely his "living and enduring word," also called *imperishable seed*. It is this that causes the born-again person to be *made alive* as we already read in Colossians 2:13. It is a very important distinction, because the term *born again* has become popular these days, and a lot of people are using those words without knowing what they mean. Some who say they have been born again mean nothing more by this than that they have turned over a new leaf and are making an effort to live a good life. They think that as a result of this they will live forever. But God is not interested in extending forever anything that we drum up ourselves. Our best just isn't good enough. That's why we need the miracle injection, and why Peter said, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

To sum up, being born again is a relatively sudden experience in which God completes a miraculous process (begun when we first allowed the Gospel to penetrate our minds) so that we rather abruptly find ourselves newly alive and with a new nature that gives us an

overwhelmingly great desire to do God's will and be close to him. It is this fact of the *miraculous change* performed in us by God that is an important key to be used in solving the problem of the relationship between faith and works.

There is a second important key, and we will familiarize ourselves with it by looking at several more parts of Scripture. One of the most explicit of these is the first one of the following Bible passages, and it tells about Jesus:

1 John 3:5, 6: "But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him." Take particular note of the last two sentences of that quote. The King James Version puts it: "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." Today's English Version reads: "So everyone who lives in union with Christ does not continue to sin; but whoever continues to sin has never seen him or known him."

What is John telling us? Is he saying that once we have been born again it is impossible for us to ever commit a sin? No, for in the preceding chapter (Chapter 2), verse 1, John says: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." It seems clear that John is here speaking to Christians. He is telling them that if anyone does sin they should remember that Jesus, having made the atoning sacrifice for them, is now their high priest and because of this their sins--even those they have committed since they have become followers of Christ--will be forgiven.

No, it is not impossible for a Christian to sin, but John is saying that it is entirely impossible for a Christian to *go on living in sin*. In the next verse in our list, also from 1 John, we will see why this is so.

1 John 3:9: "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." Do you see how this refers back to the other key--the Scripture parts we studied earlier? Remember 1 Peter 1:23?--"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." It is this seed, this power from Almighty God, that prevents a born again believer from being able to go on living a life of sin.

When a born-again Christian sins he very quickly begins to feel miserable about it. Why? Because he loves God, and the sin committed is such an offense to the divine seed, or new nature, that God has implanted in that person's mind, that said person feels very sorry for having sinned. Sin has a bad odor, spiritually speaking, and even unsaved people can smell it; but to a person whose mind has been sanctified by the indwelling word of God, sin becomes an unbearable stench and something quite impossible to live with for any length of time. The sinning, unrepentant Christian is a miserable creature--so miserable, in fact, that he cannot go on in that state. Being able to recognize sin for the abomination that it really is, and knowing that Jesus suffered horribly on the cross by being separated from God the Father in sacrifice for the world's sin, the Christian will fall on his knees--literally or figuratively--and with complete sincerity and repentance will ask God for forgiveness. It is not possible for God and sin to go on living in the same house. That is why John could make such a strong statement; and he expresses this thought not only the two times we have already read, but several more times:

1 John 5:18: "We know that no child of God keeps on sinning, for the Son of God keeps him safe, and the Evil One cannot harm him." (TEV)

1 John 2:14b: “I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

1 John 1:6: “If we claim to have fellowship with him (God) yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not put the truth into practice.” (My word in parenthesis.)

1 John 2:9: “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in darkness.”

1 John 2:29: “If you know that he (Jesus) is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” (My word in parenthesis.)

1 John 3:8: “He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

1 John 3:10: “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother.”

1 John 2:3-6: “We can be sure we know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”

It’s really rather plain, isn’t it? If you have not been born again you *will* live a sinful life; if you say you have been born again but live a sinful life, you are a liar; if you have been born again you *will* live a life that is pleasing to God because his miraculous power is at work in you.

We now have two very effective keys with which to unlock the riddle of the faith-works relationship, including the difficult Scriptures that show a close connection between works and salvation.

Key Number One is the fact that being born again has nothing to do with turning over a new leaf or reforming in the do-it-yourself sense in which we usually think of the matter of reforming. Rather, being born again comes about as the result of a miraculous and rather abrupt act of God in which his truth and power are placed into the very core of our being. As we have already read in 1 Peter 1:23, this truth and power may be thought of as seed: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

Do not confuse being born again with the whole illustration of seed falling to the ground as described in Christ’s parable of the sower (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8). It is certainly the same seed, but not every case therein described of seed falling to the various kinds of soil can be taken as referring to the born-again experience. For instance, of the seed that fell along the path and was quickly snatched away by birds, Jesus explained: “Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes along and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they cannot believe and be saved.” (Luke 8:12) So we see that when the devil came and took away the seed, the one on whose heart the seed had fallen had not yet believed and so was not yet born again. In the case of the seed falling on the rock we have an illustration of those who accept the Gospel with a certain amount of faith: “They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.” (Luke 8:13b) Jesus said that the reason for this was that they had no roots. In other words, they did not let the word sink in deeply enough; although they had some faith, it was not of sufficient quality and quantity.

I’m not sure about the seed that fell among thorns, but I rather think that in this case the heart had really received Christ and experienced the new birth. But as Christ said: “... they are

choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." (Luke 8:14b) In this case the seed was not snatched away, nor did it wither and die because of lack of saving faith; but, although it continued as a stunted growth, it did not ever produce anything really great. I think we have here a picture of a Christian who is not living a life of sin, for we have seen that that is not possible, but one who is not doing all he should be doing for the Lord. In fact, he is operating at a bare minimum of output--and I'm afraid that many Christians today fit very well into that part of the parable. As I said, I'm not sure of that one, but the final illustration in the sower parable, that of the seed which fell in good soil, definitely tells about the born-again experience followed by the growing and productive Christian life.

Certainly the seed that fell on good soil and matured is included in Romans 8:38,39: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." But obviously the first two parts of the illustration, the seed falling on the path and on rocky ground, could not be included in the awesome and wonderful security promised in Romans 8. It could not because in one case the devil came and snatched away the seed, and in the other the seed withered and died because it was not allowed to put its roots down deeply enough. Therefore we must come to the double conclusion that (1) Romans 8:38,39 is speaking only about those who have been born again, and (2) that the falling of the seed to the soil, or even allowing that seed to put down a little bit of root, is not synonymous with being born again. Rather we have here first an illustration of almost a start of conception (the seed falls to the ground; a person hears the Gospel), and then an illustration of a start of an actual pregnancy (the seed germinates and begins to put down roots; this person begins to believe the Gospel). At this point an abortion could still happen.

At what point then, does the birth take place? What must a person do to cross over the line from being a spiritual fetus to actually being born into God's family? It is the good soil that makes the difference. And what is good soil? It is the soft receptive heart that completely opens itself up to the word of God, enabling that word to put in its roots so deeply that nothing can ever dislodge it. This is complete acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. People burn bridges behind them to ensure that they will be relentless in some decision they have made; but the acceptance of Christ that brings about the new birth must be so complete that burning bridges becomes foolishness--because what is the sense of burning something that you know you will never go back to? Doubts will continue to attack the born-again believer, but he will never allow them to be a part of himself. On the other hand, the person who has some faith, but has not yet been born again, willfully allows himself some measure of doubt.

We have taken some time to look into this matter of being born again and how it comes about, but the point I'm really trying to make is that the new birth is an abrupt supernatural experience in which the power and presence of God miraculously changes the nature of the person who has undergone this experience. And it is this fact that I call Key Number One.

Key Number Two is very similar but goes a little further. What we have read in 1 John about not being able to go on living a life of sin does not apply to a person who still has some willful doubts. He can live in sin if he wants to. But when he *fully* repents of his sins, when he *completely* accepts what Jesus has done for him on the cross, in that moment his name is written in God's Book of Life in ink that will not fade, and now Romans 8:38,39 will apply to him. He has received the supernatural power--Christ's nature--that will enable him to live victoriously for God, and will prevent him from living a sinful life; for, as I said before, God will not share his

dwelling place with sin. This is what the second key is all about: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” (1 John 3:9)

We have had a careful look at these two important and closely related facts presented by the Bible, and so we are ready now to apply them to the difficult Scriptures which were listed earlier.

## CHAPTER FOUR --- THE RELATIONSHIP

WE WILL NOW CARRY ON by studying our list of works-and-salvation Scriptures, using the two keys. Remember, they are: (1) Being born again is an abrupt supernatural experience in which the power and presence of God miraculously changes the nature of the person who has undergone this experience. (2) The born-again person, having received this supernatural indwelling of God's power, can no longer live a life of sin. God's word has taken deep root in that person's heart, causing him to have an overwhelming desire to do God's will.

Out of my list of eight Scripture passages we will group three together, because they are similar, and study them first:

Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

1 Corinthians 6:9, 10: "Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

Revelation 21:7, 8: "He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Now we use the keys. First, if we believe in the Bible we must fully accept what we have just read: The wicked will not receive the kingdom of God, but those who do God's will are the ones who will receive it. Question: Who are the people who do the wicked things listed above? One of our key verses is 1 John 3:10, part of which reads: "Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother." So we see that people who live wicked lives are those who are not born again.

Another question: Since Jesus told us that only those who do the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven, we must ask who these amazing people are--for all history has shown that when it comes to doing God's will, mankind in general is an utter failure. Who, then, are these people who do the Father's will and are granted entrance into the kingdom of heaven?

According to the Bible there is one kind of people who do God's will. Remember 1 John 3:9?--"No one who is born of God continues to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." Now we know who those unique people are who do the will of the Father; they are the born-again people.

When the Bible tells us that people who do sinful things will not get into the kingdom of heaven, it is not telling us how to be saved; it is simply telling us the plain fact that those people

who live in sin will not get into the kingdom of heaven. To find out *how to get into the kingdom of heaven*, and, along with that, *how to become the kind of people who do not sin*, we have to turn to other parts of the Bible.

In the same way, when Jesus said that only those who do the will of his Father would enter the kingdom of heaven he was not telling people how to get saved; he was simply telling them that those who enter the kingdom of heaven, the saved, are people who do God's will--just as we read in John 5:18: "We know that no child of God keeps on sinning, for the Son of God keeps him safe, and the Evil One cannot harm him." (TEV)

Yes, "... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) Therefore we should not be surprised if we find Scripture verses that tell us that those who receive eternal life are the very same persons who live lives that are pleasing to God.

Although these works-and-salvation Scriptures are not instructions on how to be saved, they *are* warnings, and they *are* meant to be a challenge. When we learn that those who live sinful lives will not be allowed in the kingdom of heaven, and when we are told, by Jesus, that only those who do the will of his Father will enter the kingdom of God, we are to take a good look at ourselves--if the matter has not yet been settled--and see if there is any evidence to indicate that we really have been born again. Now, if someone takes this honest look at himself and finds that he is able to live from day to day in disobedience to God, not being very concerned about what God's will is for him, that person can be assured that he has not yet experienced the new birth. But if and when he puts his full trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ and thus allows the seed planted by God to put its roots into the depths of his heart, he will then begin to understand why Jesus said that only those who do God's will find entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Once the supernatural event of the new birth has happened to him, this person will be eager to live for his heavenly Father.

*To sum up: Because the new birth is a supernatural happening through which a person is drastically changed by God, and because this change will no longer allow this now saved person to live in sin, it follows that an honest statement can be made to the effect that those who inherit the kingdom of heaven are those who live good lives--even though it is not the living of that good life that causes that person to be saved.*

The above principle can probably be applied to any salvation-and-works passage found anywhere in the Bible. Why did the Lord give us these verses?--considering that they have presented a problem to many people. Well, for one thing, the Bible was never intended to be absorbed and understood at a glance. Although some things are perfectly plain at first reading, many other things are not; and to derive larger amounts of spiritual blessings from God's great book we are expected to expend a little spiritual and mental energy. We are expected to fervently desire to know the meanings of the Scriptures, and to pray for God's revelation to us, and to study hard and carefully with a mind tuned to God's Holy Spirit. If we don't care enough to want to do these things, then we should not be surprised if many important parts of Scripture remain a mystery to us. Another reason for the salvation-and-works Scriptures in particular must be to counteract a certain kind of abuse that the true salvation-by-grace-through-faith doctrine is subject to.

This brings us to another of the basic problems, as stated earlier: If people can be saved by God's grace alone through simple faith, won't those who are saved have a tendency to refrain from good works and live in sin instead, since they know--or, rather, think they know--that no matter what they do they will still be saved?

I believe there really are people who follow this ridiculous philosophy. They say they are saved forever by grace alone, and then, feeling quite relieved about the matter, they carry on with their lives of sin. But surely such a person must become disturbed when he reads, in the Bible: “Don’t you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?” or “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Hopefully Scriptures such as these will shake up such a person enough so that he will awaken to the fact that he has been fooling himself: He has never really accepted Christ into the depths of his heart to be his Lord and Savior. For, if he had, his nature would have been changed and he would not have been able to have a careless attitude about sin.

I dislike reading accounts of deathbed scenes involving unsaved people, for they can be horribly frightening and chilling; but I will here quote some of the last words of Francis Spira, AD 1548, as related in *Voices from the Edge of Eternity*, compiled by John Myers and published by *Spire Books*. Apparently this account was an excerpt from an earlier book, *Dying Words*, by A. H. Gottschall. Francis Spira is a recorded example, if the story is true, of the very kind of person we have been talking about.

We are told that he was a Venetian lawyer who was attracted by the reformation principles of Luther. As a result of this, Spira preached the evangelical doctrines for six years. But persecution from the Roman Catholics caused him to publicly recant in the presence of 2,000 people. After that he had no peace and believed himself to be irrevocably lost. The following deathbed quote reveals that he had been living a sinful life even while he was preaching salvation by grace. He said: “Take heed against relying on a faith which does not work a holy and unblamable life, worthy of a believer. It will fail! I presumed I had the right faith; I preached it to others. I had all places in Scripture in memory that might support it. I thought myself sure, and in the meantime lived impiously and carelessly. Now the judgement of God hath overtaken me, not to correction, but to damnation.”

What he was saying at this horrible end of his life sounds amazingly similar to what we read in the Bible in James, who said that faith without works is dead; for Spira warned against a “faith that does not work a holy and unblamable life.” This is in complete accordance with what we have been reading in 1 John 3:9: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” Spira cannot have earlier taken this passage from John seriously, for if he had he would not have “thought myself sure.” As it was, he admitted that, although considering himself saved, he lived impiously and carelessly.

So if someone comes up to you and tells you that he is born again, saved by the grace of God, and because of this he can live in sin and get away with it, then you are face to face with a liar. Mind you, he may be lying to himself even more than to you, for he may have talked himself into believing that he really has faith. In any case, you can be sure that a person who takes that kind of attitude toward sin has not fully accepted the love of Jesus. He has not fully accepted what Christ has done for him on the cross. If he had made a complete decision for Jesus, fully accepting him as Lord and Savior, then the roots of God’s implanted seed would have penetrated so deeply and securely into his soul that he would ever after have hated sin with a fervent hatred. He would likely stumble over sin now and then, but never, never, *never*, would he be able to look at it carelessly and say, “Well, what does it matter if I sin? I’m saved anyhow.” Anyone who can talk that way or feel that way proves that he has not been born again. “That is why 1 John 2:4 tells us: “The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

We will now move on to two more salvation-and-works Scriptures:

Revelation 20:12: “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”

Revelation 22:12: “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”

In the first of these two, John is talking about his prophetic vision of the second resurrection. The works-and-salvation problem here is easily solved, and we hardly need to use our two keys. Nevertheless, this Scripture may be confusing to some so I will include an explanation.

The first resurrection is described a little earlier in the same chapter. As you carefully read that section (Revelation 20:4-6) you will find that there is really nothing there to indicate that all born-again Christians will be included in this first resurrection. Rather, one could think that it is a special resurrection for a distinct category of believers. The first part of Verse 4 tells us: “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the Word of God.” However, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 23 reads: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.” This passage does not make a distinction between martyrs and other believers regarding the first resurrection, so perhaps the statement regarding martyrdom in Revelation 20:4-6 is a matter of emphasis. In any case, these resurrected saints of God will reign with Christ for one thousand years on Earth. The same chapter tells us that during this thousand years of peace on Earth, the devil will be imprisoned. Near the end of that time he will be released and will then gather together an army with which to attack the “camp of God’s people.” But God will defeat him and his army with fire from Heaven. It is Satan’s final and complete defeat.

After this comes the second resurrection: “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:12-15)

The most important factor in this passage is, of course, the book of life. Whether or not a person is thrown into the lake of fire depends entirely on that book; only those whose names are written in it escape this awful wage of sin, which is also called the second death. So we see that there is indeed a judgement of works for the unbelievers, but it is entirely grace through faith that saves the believers. That is why Paul said: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

There is, however, a different kind of works-judgement for believers, but this is not a matter of salvation but a matter of special rewards for work well done. In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Paul is talking about Christian work being built on the foundation which is Christ himself. Paul says: “If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only

as one escaping through the flames.” This could, and would, be taken by many as a salvation-by-works Scripture, if it were not for the fact that the passage clearly expresses that the person in question is saved even though his works have proved to be lacking.

A very good Scripture evidence to support the fact that there will be varying degrees of reward for believers is 1 Corinthians 3:8. Here Paul is thinking of the Christian “field of service” as though it really were a field or a garden. He says: “The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.”

In the passage about the second resurrection where we are told that the dead will be judged according to what they have done as recorded in the books, I don’t know if this refers only to those whose names were not found written in the book of life or if it also includes those whose names are written there. But I do know that in the case of the unsaved it is the record of the things they have done that determines their degree of punishment, for we are told plainly that the dead are judged according to what they have done; and if their names are not found in the book of life then there is nothing left but that the works-judgement must apply to them. If the words about judgement according to works in this passage also have an application to the saved (although I’m not at all sure they do in this case), then it is a matter of determining the greatness or smallness of their rewards for their service to Christ which they have rendered to him since the time they accepted him as their Savior. Revelation 22:12 tells us: “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.” This statement by our Lord applies to both the saved and the unsaved. In the case of the unsaved it is a simple and horrible matter of people being required to justly pay for their own sins, for they have refused to let Christ pay for them. In the case of the saved, whose sins are covered by the blood of Christ, it is a case of children being rewarded by their Father for things they have done since they became his children. The matter of how to be born again, or saved, or brought into God’s family, is not mentioned in this particular Scripture verse. Therefore this Scripture and also Revelation 20:12, about the second resurrection, do not support the salvation-by-works doctrine. Verse 15 of Revelation 20 makes it plain that salvation is a matter quite separate from being judged according to works done: “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” This book of life is set apart distinctly from the other books. About the books (plural) we are told that they contain a record of things done by people; but about the book of life (singular) we are not told anything definite except that it contains the names of those who are saved. There is plenty enough in other parts of the Bible to let us know that only those who trust in Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross will have their names written in the book of life. We have already quoted many of them and will now draw to a close this matter of the judgement at the second resurrection by quoting Romans 3:21-25: “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. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”

## CHAPTER FIVE --- JAMES ON FAITH AND WORKS

WE NOW COME TO what is probably the most difficult and controversial section of the Bible in regard to the relationship between faith and works, namely James 2:14-26. What we have already studied will help us in understanding this part of the letter of James. Our two keys will be very much needed here. To better establish what the problem is, let's quote Paul first as he proclaims salvation through faith, and then immediately quote some of James so that we can take an honest look at the seeming contradiction.

Ephesians 2:8, 9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."

James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." (NAS)

If we are saved by grace through faith, apart from works, as Paul so plainly tells us, then what is the meaning of James 2:24 and of the whole section on faith and works in James. Let's read all of it. (For the remainder of this chapter, all quotes from James will be from the *New American Standard* translation unless otherwise marked. All other quotes will continue to be from the *New International Version* unless otherwise marked.)

James 2:14-26: "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or a sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and 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? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

Let's take this piece by piece:

James 2:14: "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?"

Notice the wording in regard to faith in the first sentence: "... if a man says he has faith..." This introduction gives us the basis for one use of the word *faith* throughout the rest of

this whole section. James is not talking about someone who really has faith, but about someone who *says he has faith*. If James had been using modern punctuation he probably would have written the second sentence thus: “Can that “faith” save him?” Although he does not use quotation marks to indicate that he is using the word *faith* in an unusual way, he does, a little further on, show plainly that he is talking about two different kinds of faith, so it amounts to the same thing. We will look into that in a moment. Also by saying, “Can that faith save him?” he is strongly implying that he is talking about a certain kind of faith. So in the first two sentences James is simply saying that it is useless for a man to say he has faith if he does not have any works, for that kind of “faith” will not save him. He is in perfect agreement with 1 John 2:29, talking about Jesus: “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” He is also in agreement with Paul, who, in Titus 2:13b, 14, says: “... Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Those who have real faith will be eager to do what is good, so James is simply stating a hard and fast fact of life when he lets us know that someone who says he has faith, but has no works being produced by it, will not be saved by that kind of faith--for that kind of faith obviously doesn't amount to a small hill of puffed wheat. In other words, it's not real faith; it's just someone saying they have faith.

James 2:15-17: “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.”

Faith, hope, and love are the three greatest qualities, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13. In the quotation above, James is using an illustration involving love to explain something about faith. It can be seen that just as love that does not express itself in action is not a real love at all, so faith that does not express itself in action is no faith at all. The fact that love is just like faith in this regard is pointed out in 1 John 3:18: “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” This verse can help us much to understand the whole section of James that we are studying, for just as John wrote about an imitation kind of love, so James is telling us to avoid an imitation faith. Real love and real faith are both followed by good deeds just as sure as noon follows morning. James, knowing this, summed up his illustration by saying: “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”

Now we begin to see more clearly that James is talking about two different kinds of faith--live faith and dead faith. When we ordinarily talk about faith we mean, of course, the live kind which is the only real kind. Faith, by its very nature and in its true meaning is a live and powerful force. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as dead faith, but human language is flexible enough so that we can express ourselves very well, at times, by departing a little from standard usage. The Bible, being written in human language and recording words as though spoken by people using human language, contains a lot of such usage. A simple example is the case in Luke 13:32 where Jesus refers to Herod as being a fox. If it were not for this natural flexibility in human language that we take for granted, we would have to assume that King Herod had become a four-legged animal. So James talking about dead faith is not really difficult but, in fact, very helpful. He could also have called it phony faith and a few other things, depending on the circumstances of each case. However, by calling it *dead* faith he better emphasized that it was powerless, impotent, useless, and so we should get the message that it is not real faith at all. He further expresses this thought in next sentence:

James 2:18: “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.’”

We get the feeling that the “someone” who could make this hypothetical statement was quite incredulous about the faith of the person he was talking to. In any case, whoever does not produce good works cannot lay claim to any kind of faith but the dead kind, which is not real faith in the sense in which the word is ordinarily used. And it is only through real faith that God’s gracious salvation comes to us.

But maybe we should look a little more closely at what James might mean by dead faith. It can include completely phony faith, in which there is no belief involved; but James makes it clear, in his next statement, that it can also include a certain kind of actual believing:

James 2:19: “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”

In Chapter One I dealt in greater detail with the matter of what true faith is. I used the above Scripture, James 2:19, to demonstrate that simply believing something to be true about God need not be of any great value to us. The kind of faith that God wants us to have, and the kind through which we are saved, involves not only belief but also submission to God out of a heart of love. The born-again experience happens when the human soul opens itself (good soil) in such a way that the roots from God’s seed are allowed to sink in deeply. This opening up of the soul to God is not a cold, calculated mental maneuver, for such an attitude does not create a climate inviting to God. This would not be good soil, but just the opposite. Therefore when Paul says that we are saved by grace through faith, he is talking about a faith that opens up to God with gratitude and love--not only believing him, but accepting him. We cannot accept him into our hearts without feeling love for him, for God is love.

James is pointing out the fact that it won’t do anybody any good to believe that there is a great God--if that’s as far as it goes. This would be dead faith for it would not be accepting God into the soul. And because it would not be accepting God into the soul there would be no new birth. And because there would be no new birth there would be no life of good works following. As we go on with studying this section of the Bible, keep in mind that James is talking about two kinds of faith--dead “faith” and real faith.

James 2:20, 21: “But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?”

In the first sentence James is, of course, talking about what he himself calls dead faith; and the writings of Paul are quite in agreement, for he also believed that only true faith was of value. But in the second sentence of the above Scripture, James swings over to the positive side as he tells about Abraham. This is a contrast, for Abraham had both faith and works, his works proving that his faith was not dead but real. Nevertheless, this verse about Abraham is difficult, for James makes a statement, in the form of a question, to the effect that Abraham was justified by works. This may be a good time to look into the matter of works a little more deeply, and the following verse of Scripture will help us to get started on this.

Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Using the above Scripture as a starting point, I will show you that there are two distinct kinds of works involved in salvation and justification. The first kind is the striving of an unsaved person as he tries to do the will of God. Paul sometimes refers to this as works, sometimes as the

effort to obey the law of God, and maybe Paul uses other words in expressing this, but the idea is always the same: The unsaved person, if he tries to do God's will, invariably falls short of God's requirements. Paul talks about this in Romans 3:23 where he says: "... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." Paul also says, in Romans 3:20, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."

Then, in the verses immediately following those just quoted, Paul tells us about a new way of becoming righteous. Romans 3:21, 22a: "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." We have already seen that a righteousness that comes from God is bound to produce good works. That is our second key, and I quoted much from 1 John to support this. However, the point that I'm trying to make now is not that good works follow being born again, but that the good works that do follow being born again are in an entirely different category than the good works that we occasionally manage before we are born again. And the difference is not quantity. The difference is this: Good works done by an unsaved person are tainted with the sinfulness (wrong motives, etc.) of the sin-infected heart out of which they come. But good works done by a born-again person do not come out of his old nature at all, but come out of Christ's nature dwelling in that person, having become a part of that person. So this second kind of good works is bound to be clean and pure. However, for Christ to actually be able to work like this inside of us, it is necessary that our old nature be immobilized. Paul was talking about all this when he said, as I have already quoted: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul is saying that it is because of his faith in the Son of God, and because Christ died a sacrificial death on the cross ("gave himself for me") that he, Paul, now has Christ living in him. And because he has Christ living in him, that life of Christ has become his own life ("The life I live in the body..."). In other words, the nature of Christ living in Paul has become the motor that drives his whole being. Do you see now that the good works that result from this are entirely different from the good works that Paul did before he had this new nature from Christ? Of course they are different, because they come from two very different sources.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, when Paul says that we are not saved by works, he is talking about the first kind of works as well as the second kind. It is impossible for an unsaved person to have the second kind; a saved person uses the second kind, but it is not that which saves him. Rather he has already been saved, and that's why he can produce these wonderful good works that are pleasing to God.

Ephesians 2:8-10: "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Verses 8 and 9 are very often quoted by evangelicals while Verse 10 is usually not included; and yet the three verses together are a classic and wonderful explanation of the relationship between faith and works.

We have been talking about works produced by Christ dwelling in the saved believer; and we have been talking about the kind of faith that saves because it is real and because it is focused on Christ who gave himself for us. I now wish to point out that faith can be real even though it is not saving faith. Rahab is given as an example of someone having real faith, but this was not

focused on Christ and the cross (for the Messiah had not yet come) and her faith in regard to the spies did not save her soul, but only her physical life and the lives of her family. She had to wait until Christ had suffered and died and gone to preach the good news to the dead (1 Peter 3:18-20) before she had a chance to exercise her faith in a saving way.

Faith is real faith if it is of sufficient quantity and quality to measure up to whatever is required by God under the circumstances. Abraham needed to believe that God would give him a son and make of him a great nation, and that he would be a blessing to all nations. Later he needed to believe that God could raise Isaac from the dead.

Now, going back to the matter of works, I must point out that even the good works that come from an unsaved person, when he sincerely tries to do God's will, are pleasing to God. God was pleased with the help that Rahab gave to the spies, and in the same way was pleased with many of the righteous acts of unsaved people in the Old Testament. These good works by unsaved people do come as a result of true faith, but since that true faith is not centered in Christ--often because these people have not heard of Christ--it is not a saving faith.

We will now go back to James 2:20, 21: "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?"

By "faith without works is useless" James did not mean that we are not saved or born again through faith apart from works. What he meant was that *the kind of faith that does not produce works (dead faith) is useless* for anything, including salvation. Paul states in many places that action follows true faith, and he too, like James, could have said, "Faith without works (dead faith) is useless."

The next verse in the quote from James which we are considering is: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" Now James does not indicate that Abraham was saved or born again by works, but that he was justified by works, along with faith. The Greek word for *justified* seems to be about as broad as the English one and need not necessarily refer to the complete justification of salvation, although it often does. The same Greek word that James used is also used in the following Scriptures:

Matthew 11:19b: "But wisdom is justified of her children." (KJV) This means that wisdom is proved to be right by what it produces.

Luke 7:29: "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." (KJV)

A definition of the Greek word, *justify*, as presented in *Strong's Dictionary of the Greek Testament*, reads: "to render (i.e. show or regard as) just or innocent:--free, justify (-ier), be righteous."

As I have said, this word, *justify*, or *justified*, is often used to denote the overall justification that goes with salvation, but not always. In what way is James using it? He is saying that God acknowledged Abraham to have done right. Similarly, the good works we do as Christians (as a result of Christ working in us) are approved of by God so that he looks on us as living righteous lives. It follows that the more good works we do by the power of Christ working in us, the more righteous God will consider us to be. This, then, is not a one-time happening like salvation, but an ongoing growing experience. The *New International Version* translates Verse 21 in a way that corresponds to the above trend of thinking: "Was not our ancestor Abraham *considered righteous* for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" And *Williams* translates: "Was not our forefather Abraham *shown to be upright* by his good deeds, namely, by offering Isaac his son upon the altar?" (My italics in both cases.) These

translations do not give the impression that anyone was being saved, or born again, by works; but rather that what they did, as a result of having true faith, was pleasing to God. Even apart from the above translations, there is no reason to assume that James was talking about salvation; for, as I have said, the Greek word which is translated as *justified* in many versions is broad enough in its meaning so that it need not be restricted to the forgiveness and justification that goes along with salvation.

So, all we can definitely say about Verse 21 is that James is telling us is that good works play an important role in making us righteous and pleasing to God. This does not contradict anything at all in Ephesians 2:8, 9.

We will carry on, now, with the next two verses in this section of James:

James 2:22, 23: “You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God.”

As we have seen, true faith and good works always go together, so one could say that they are working together—and this is what James does say in the first part of the first sentence. Then he goes on to say that by works faith is perfected. At first this sounds backwards, because we know that works come as a result of faith, not the other way around; so if James had said that works were perfected by faith, we would not have had a problem here. However, what he did say is that faith is perfected by works. What did he mean? We may find a clue by hunting up the Greek word for *perfected* or *made perfect* as used in the *New American Standard* and *King James* versions respectively. If you look in a Greek dictionary you will find that the word can mean: *to complete, to accomplish, to consummate, to consecrate, to perfect, to finish, and to fulfill*.

The same Greek word used in James 2:22 for *perfected* is translated in John 19:28 as *fulfilled*: “Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’” In the King James Version the same word is again translated as *fulfilled* in Luke 2:43: “And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.” Therefore James 2:22 could read: “You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works faith was fulfilled.” It hasn’t been translated that way in the NIV, but it could have been, for both translations would be using the same word to translate, one to the word *perfected* and one to the word *fulfilled*, both of which are true and good choices.

Beck, in his the *Language of Today* version, follows this same interpretation but translates: “You see his faith was active with works and by works reached its goal.” If this is a good translation then there is no more problem. James is not saying, then, that works were necessary to do anything to make faith right, but rather that faith used works to reach its goal, or be fulfilled.

In the case that *perfected* should be a better translation than *fulfilled*, another interpretation would be that faith was working with works, and as a result of the works faith was shown to have been perfected.

Now, what about the next verse? “... and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God.” In Romans 4:2, 3 Paul seems to contradict James by saying: “If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’”

Paul and James took this quote, about Abraham believing God, from Genesis 15:6. God had come to Abraham in a vision and told him that he would have a son and that his descendents would be like the stars of heaven--too many to count. It is at this point that the writer of Genesis states that Abraham, then called Abram, believed God and that God reckoned this to him as righteousness. Years later, after the promised son, Isaac, had been born and was growing up, God tested Abraham's faith by ordering him to slay Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering. Abraham, though he loved his son and though he knew that Isaac was the one through whom the promise of innumerable descendents was to be fulfilled, nevertheless obeyed God and went forward with preparations for the sacrifice. At the last moment, as Abraham was reaching for the knife with which to slay his son, God called out to him and told him not to harm the boy. God had never intended for Abraham to sacrifice his son, but had tested the man's faith and obedience to the utmost. At this point God again made promises to Abraham that reached into eternity, saying that by Abraham's descendents all nations of the earth would bless themselves. This was referring to the fact that Jesus would be born of those descendents.

This testing of Abraham is recorded in Genesis 22:1-18; but now let's go back to Genesis 15:6 where it says that Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. How is it that this quote was used by both Paul and James, apparently to prove two entirely different things? Well, so long as what Paul and James are saying is not in contradiction with each other, even though it's different, maybe there's nothing wrong with them using the same Scripture passage from Genesis to help support what they're saying. Let's investigate that, keeping in mind the thought expressed earlier that faith can be real, even if it's not saving faith, so long as it meets God's requirements under the circumstances at hand.

The most obvious meaning of Genesis 15:6 is that Abraham believed what God had just told him about his future son and descendents. This was all that was required of Abraham in this matter, and because he had this true faith, God acknowledged and decreed that Abraham was righteous in believing him.

Paul uses this as an example and illustration to show that God is pleased with faith alone, apart from works, for in Genesis 15:6 Abraham does not do anything; he simply believes and gratefully accepts what God tells him. And so Paul says that in the same way God will accept a sinner completely through faith in Christ, apart from works.

James, however, is not thinking basically about Genesis 15:6, but about Genesis 22:1-18, in which Abraham, continuing to believe God, is willing to sacrifice Isaac and begins to do so. At this point God is pleased not only with Abraham's faith which motivated the action, but is also pleased with the action itself--that is, pleased with the fact that Abraham was actually willing to do it to please God. Therefore James uses this whole faith-and-works example from Genesis 22 to show that God justifies or acknowledges as righteous the person who does a good deed, for having done that deed. Because Abraham's obedient act was motivated by faith that had already begun in Genesis 15:6, James refers back to that Scripture, saying that that faith was fulfilled in the action of obedience in Genesis 22.

So it turns out that Paul and James are both right even though at first glance they seem to be saying the opposite to each other. They are both right because they are using two different parts of Scripture (Genesis 15:6 and Genesis 22:1-18) to illustrate two different points; and the two points are, in fact, very well illustrated by those two different parts of Scripture. But these two parts of Scripture are related by the same faith of Abraham which is expressed in Genesis 15:6. Therefore both Paul and James quote that Scripture.

When Paul says that Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, he is staying within the limits of Genesis 15:6 where that faith has not yet expressed itself in works. Therefore Paul can rightly use that quote as an illustration of how God is pleased with faith apart from works--or, in other words, before that faith has a chance to be fulfilled in works.

James, however, is not staying within the limits of Genesis 15:6, but has moved to Genesis 22 where Abraham's faith has resulted in good works. James is using the example of Abraham's obedience to prove that good works please God, and that good works always follow true faith. It is because of this latter fact that James refers back to the same Scripture that Paul uses, Genesis 15:6.

Paul shows that salvation comes through grace by faith, and not by works, by showing that God was pleased with Abraham's faith before that faith resulted in works. (Genesis 15:6)

James shows that God is pleased with works, justifying or acknowledging the righteousness of our acts--shows this by telling us about how Abraham's faith, which had already begun in Genesis 15:6, resulted in good works in Genesis 22:1-18. When James quotes: "... and the Scripture was fulfilled..." he is saying that as God was pleased with Abraham for his faith in Genesis 15, God was again pleased with him in Genesis 22, this time for his works that came from his faith: "... and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'"

Our next verse, in this whole section from James, is a repeat of a problem we have already been through:

James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." Since this particular verse probably strikes evangelicals and fundamentalists as being the most straightforward example of the faith-and-works problem in James, we will consider it by itself, reiterating the solution we have already found and applying it to this verse.

Remember that James has in mind two kinds of faith: *dead faith* and *real faith*. To further substantiate my claim that James uses words in more than one way, giving them unusual meanings, I would like to call your attention to another part of James' letter in which he talks about two kinds of wisdom--just as he talks about two kinds of faith.

James 3:13-17: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then piece-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."

In this case the NIV translators did put quotation marks around the word *wisdom* where it was used in an unusual way. They could just as well have done the same with the word *faith* when used in a similar manner. The standard meaning of the word *wisdom* has no connection with evil, so, in a way, there is no such thing as evil wisdom. In the same way, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as dead faith. But James makes good use of the flexibility of human language to express the important matters that the Lord is telling us through him.

Now, going back to James 2:24, and keeping in mind that we have been dealing all along with two kinds of faith, we ask ourselves which of the two kinds he is referring to: "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." Well, I think he is talking about dead faith, for he refers to it as being alone (it has no works to go with it) and he has already told us that faith that does not produce works is dead faith. Therefore, according to James' own previous use

and explanations of the word *faith*, this sentence could read: “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith without works, which is dead faith, phony faith, inadequate faith, or head faith which does not open the heart to God in trust.” Put more simply, the last part of Verse 24 tells us that a person is not justified by an unreal kind of faith. So there is no problem in that.

But the first part of the sentence tells us that a man is justified by works. Is this in contradiction to what Paul says in Ephesians? As we discovered earlier, the Greek word for *justified* has shades of meaning about as broad as the English word used in its place, and meaning much the same things, so *justified* seems to be a good choice for translation. My point is that *justified* as used in this verse need not be equated with *saved* or *born again*. It can simply mean *to be regarded as righteous in any particular instance*, as in Luke 7:29: “When they heard this all the people and the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John...” (RSV) The *New American Standard* puts it this way: “And when all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John.” The same Greek word that was here translated *acknowledged God’s justice* was translated as *justified* in James 2:24: “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.” And in the passage from Luke it cannot be equated with salvation since it is referring to God. People do not save God. But let me make it very clear that this same word is more often than not used in close relationship to salvation and the born-again experience. In the case of James 2:24, however, it would seem logical to assume that James was not referring to salvation or the justifying experience of being born again; but, rather, that he was using the word more in the sense of Luke 7:29, of acknowledging justice. Why? Because the rest of the Bible, in regard to salvation, teaches that salvation is a free gift of God that can’t be earned; and because I see no particular reason to conclude that the word *justified*, as James uses it, refers to salvation or being born again.

To sum up: In James 2:24 James is saying that a man is acknowledged to be just, or righteous, by his works, and not by “faith” without works. Williams--in *his Language of the People* version--agrees with my conclusion about the word *justified*, for his translation reads: “You see that a man is shown to be upright by his good deeds, and not merely by his faith.”

What has been said about verses 21-24 also applies to the next verse:

James 2:25: “And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”

This is like the illustration about Abraham, and shows that James was concerned that Christians should live lives that are pleasing to God, doing things for one another in love. Williams translates this also in a way that is not contradictory to Paul’s letters or any other part of the Bible: “Was not even Rahab the prostitute shown to be upright by her good deeds, namely, by entertaining the scouts and sending them off by a different road?”

Before leaving the subject, James wanted to re-emphasize the important fact that real faith is always followed by good works, and, conversely, that if there are no good works issuing from an individual then he has nothing more than dead faith. He expressed this, once more, in the closing sentence of his section on faith and works.

James 2:26: “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” We have already seen that *dead faith* is not really faith at all but a phony substitute. Therefore it is not the kind of faith that Paul was talking about when he declared that we are saved by grace through faith. That real kind of faith is invariably followed by--“... good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”--as Paul was careful to point out in Verse 10 of his statement. There is no disagreement between Paul and James.

That Paul and James were not in disagreement is indicated also by the fact that Paul contributed a difficult works-and-salvation verse that sounds as though it could have been written by James. We will consider that verse now.

Philippians 2:12b: "... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling..."

The two key words here are *work* and *salvation*, so we must find the meanings of the Greek words which they replace. The Greek word for *work*, in this case, seems to have some modifications inherent in it which indicate not only working but working fully--in other words, to accomplish something. This can imply bringing a work to a finish. That is why the translators added the word *out*. To just work does not indicate the bringing of anything to a conclusion, but to work out something does indicate a reaching of a goal, or of bringing something to a finish.

The Greek word for *salvation*, used here, offers no special problems, nor does it offer any special help. It has the same kind of flexibility that the English word has, and can mean to be rescued or delivered, physically or morally, or both. It is obvious that Paul is here talking about spiritual salvation.

So, then, we have Paul instructing fellow believers to work out (bring to a finish or conclusion) their spiritual salvation. He is not talking about being saved in the sense of being born again, but rather in the sense of being perfected and finally being ushered into the new time of great glory--the final salvation that God has prepared for us. Williams goes even further than I would at this point, and yet the first sentence in the *Publisher's Preface* to this translation states: "In the minds of many exacting Greek scholars this is the best translation of the New Testament existing in the English language today." (1963) Williams puts Philippians 2:12 in this way: "... so now with reverence and awe keep on working clear down to the finishing point of your salvation..." This almost makes it sound as though the working is not really having any effect on the salvation, but that we are just to keep on working until we reach that point where our salvation becomes complete and we are forever with the Lord. Today's English Version keeps the cause-and-effect relationship between works and salvation, but, like Williams, recognizes that Paul was talking about a long, gradual movement toward the final completion of our salvation, rather than about the relatively abrupt experience of the new birth. Today's English Version reads: "Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation."

In the sense that we are saved when we are born again, and our names are written in the book of life, our salvation is already complete. But in the sense that we are still living in this present world of trouble and are still not perfect or fit for the new world--in that sense our salvation is not yet complete. As proof that the word *salvation* does not always refer to the born-again experience but is sometimes used in the Bible in reference to the conclusion of our salvation, I will offer two Scriptures. Hebrews 9:28 tells us: "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." And in 1 Peter 1:5 we read: "Through faith you are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." So you see that although a person is saved in the sense of being born again, that salvation will not be complete, in the sense of God's promises all being fulfilled, until the marriage feast of the lamb. And the Bible tells us that our righteous acts, done by the power of Christ working through us, have a lot to do with preparing us for that marriage supper.

Revelation 19:7, 8: "'Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (NAS)

It is this fine linen, these “righteous acts of the saints” that Paul was talking about when he said, “... work out your salvation with fear and trembling....” (NAS) Or, “Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation....” (TEV) Paul is speaking to people who have already received the new birth as a free gift from God. Because of this they have eternal life and God himself indwells them and does good works through them, and helps them to do good works. These good works help to prepare them for the day when their rescue from sin, their salvation, will be complete in every way and they will be forever with the Lord in glory. These good works prepare them for the future life with Christ because they help them to grow spiritually, to become more loving and righteous.

Referring to this kind of working to complete salvation, Paul is careful to add, in the next verse, that this working comes about as a result of God giving us each a new nature. Paul says: “For it is God who works in you to will and to do what pleases him.” (Philippians 2:13)

We have seen, then, that there is no contradiction in the writings of Paul and of James concerning faith, works, and salvation. Peter also agrees with them, and so do the powerful statements made in 1 John about good works always following true faith.

To sum up, all these servants of God, including the writer of Hebrews (whether or not that was Paul), are together rendering an integrated statement that includes the following points: (1) Being saved, or being born again, is a free gift that can’t be earned. It comes to us when we repent of our sins and gratefully accept Jesus as the one who suffered and died for us on the cross. (2) When we fully accept Jesus into our hearts and thus are born again, he gives us a new nature that wants to do God’s will; therefore it is no longer possible for us to live a life of sin. (3) This can happen only if we believe in Jesus with true faith. Therefore if we do not produce a life of good works it is a sure sign that we do not have true faith. We may have a phony substitute which can be called dead faith, but since this would not allow Christ to live in us, we would not be able to live a life of good works. (4) When a person has true faith and Christ lives in him, and Christ works through that person by giving him a Christlike nature and so producing a life of good works, those good works become an important factor in preparing that person for the completion of his salvation--the entrance into the future world of glory.

In regard to this last point it is important to remember that entrance into the future world of glory was already completely decided upon and determined in the moment that Christ was first fully accepted as Savior. It was a totally free gift--the born-again experience. What follows after that is basically unalterable--the new nature given us by Christ working in the saved person and preparing him for the glorious complete fulfillment of his salvation.

Now that we have carefully examined the relationship between faith and works, you will be more likely to take note of many Scripture verses that show this relationship. Maybe you have been, in the past, reading these verses without realizing what they mean; but now, as I quote some of them, you will see that they beautifully express the faith-works relationship that we have been studying. I will occasionally add italics to the parts of the following Scriptures that specifically show the faith-works relationship.

Acts 26:20, 21: (Paul speaking to King Agrippa) “First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God *and prove their repentance by their deeds.*” Doesn’t this sound a lot like James? Yes, and it also sounds a lot like 1 John 3:6: “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”

Those who abuse the doctrine of free salvation by grace, when they claim that they can be born again and then go on their merry way living sinfully must have a hard time with the following verse of Scripture.

2 Corinthians 5:15: “And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

Hebrews 11:31: “By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.” Do you see how closely the writer relates faith and works? He starts out the sentence by talking about faith and ends it by talking about obedience. He could do this because he realized that true faith is always followed by obedience. The true faith that Rahab had (in this case, of course, it was a limited faith, but nevertheless real) enabled her to do the right thing in regard to the spies.

Galatians 5:6: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is *faith expressing itself through love.*”

1 Corinthians 6:9-11: “Don’t you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.” Because they were washed and sanctified by the Spirit of God they are now empowered to live for God and no longer do the evil things listed in the first part of the passage.

The Bible does not anywhere teach a philosophy of “Now that I’m saved by the grace of God I can live in sin and still be saved.” Nor does the Bible teach that we are saved by living a good life. What the Bible teaches is that we are saved entirely by the grace of God through faith in Christ, and that when this happens to us we are miraculously transformed so that from then on we will not live in sin but live for God. It is wonderful that in so many places in the Scriptures where salvation by the grace of God is mentioned, we also find (often in the same sentence, or in a verse following) the information that good works are the outcome of that free salvation. The following is another example of this:

Titus 2:11-14: “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*”

1 Peter 2:24: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” Again we find the same relationship, this time emphasizing the fact that we are saved because Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our sins. Then Peter tells us that this happened so that we would no longer live in sin but instead do God’s will. If you read all of that chapter you will find that nowhere does Peter refer to physical illness or disease; therefore the last part of Verse 24 could not be referring basically to anything physical but rather to the disease of sin, about which he has just been writing. So when Peter says, “By his wounds you have been healed,” he is telling us that it is a direct result of Christ’s suffering that we are now able to live victoriously and do God’s will.

*This is the Gospel story: When we believe in Christ with true faith, gratefully accepting what he has done for us on the cross and accepting his resurrection, he forgives us, gives us eternal life, and gives us a new Christlike nature, changing us so that we will be fit for the glorious life to come.*

That is why James and John too, in their letters, could say with such conviction that the whole idea of a true believer living his life without good works was ridiculous and impossible.

It is interesting that the very Scripture part that is probably most often thought of as being in contradiction with James' emphasis on good works, namely Ephesians 2:8,9, in actual fact agrees with James and conclusively expresses the relationship between faith and work--that is, when verses 8 and 9 are read together with Verse 10. I can think of no better way to bring my study on the relationship between faith and works to a close than by quoting these three verses of Scripture that so comprehensively cover the subject:

Ephesians 2:8-10: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

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