

Question: Do Paul and James, in their writings, reach different conclusions on man's "justification" by God?

Whatever Paul and James wrote on the subject of man's justification, there is no contradiction. To say otherwise is to make God the author of confusion, which He is not (1 Cor 14:33). As we noted last week, justification is the Bible term for being right with God. It denotes man's state of being vindicated, acquitted and deemed righteous by God.

There are many factors involved in man's justification.

- 1) Jesus died for our sins, but He was raised for our justification (Rom 4:25).
- 2) The Law of Moses led Jews to Christ so they could experience justification (Gal 3:24).
- 3) Justification is accomplished by God's grace and by man's faith in the gospel (Ti 3:7; Rom 5:1).
- 4) Justification is obtained through obedient faith (Jas 2:24).

Taken together, Paul and James show us how justification relates to grace, faith and works.

Paul - *"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness"* (Rom 4:2-5).

James - *"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ... Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ... You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only"* (Jas 2:14-26).

How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory statements? We simply consider the context and the audience to whom the statements were addressed.

Paul speaks of justification from the Jewish perspective. Many Jews acted as though they could earn justification by keeping of Law of Moses, thereby eliminating the need for God's grace. Hence Paul's statement, *"if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God."* No one may boast of deserving God's justification, even if he or she is perfectly obedient to Him.

James speaks of justification from the Christian's perspective. First, let's not misrepresent James. He does not overlook the grace of God (cf. 1:17, 4:6). James is simply prompting his brethren to think by asking them a question, *"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?"* By the word "faith" he implies faith only. James then answers his question by listing Abraham and Rahab as examples of obedient faith, by which God justified them. James concludes by saying, *"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."* James is not considering earning salvation (Paul's subject), but how faith must be active in order to obtain and maintain God's justification.

Therefore, Paul and James are not contradicting each other. They are simply writing about justification from different perspectives. Many religious people regard justification as a one-time gift from God based solely upon a person's belief in Christ. But Abraham was justified by faith many times in his life (cf. Gen 12:1-4; Heb 11:8; Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3, 18-22; Jas 2:21-23; Heb 11:17-19). Some go so far as to say that even a person's faith is a gift from God. Indeed the Gospel, the source of faith (Rom 1:17), is a gift from God, but it is powerless to justify man apart from teaching it - and an obedient, working, faithful response to it.

The unwavering faith of Abraham caused him, with a few exceptions in his life, to have an active obedient faith in God. And that is why *"it was accounted to him for righteousness"* (Rom 4:22).

Study your Bible and search the Truth. Write us today to enroll in a free Bible correspondence course by mail. Thanks for reading!

