

Honest Answers to Honest Questions

Question 9: What are the main differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics? Are they important?

There are many differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics, but the major theological disagreement is over the manner of one's salvation.

In all the religions of the world, there are only three ways that a person may attain "salvation" (as each religion defines it). They are –

1. **Salvation by "Works" alone** – "Works" are good deeds done for which a reward is conferred or received. This group would include most of the Eastern religions
2. **Salvation by "Faith" alone** – Saving "Faith" is all that is necessary for salvation – "Good works" will inexorably flow out of a living, saving "faith" and are the sure fruit and evidence of it, but they are not a joint cause with faith in attaining salvation. This group would include the various Protestant denominations.
3. **Salvation by a combination of "Faith + Works"** – Salvation is attained by a combination of faith and works. This group would include Roman Catholicism and the American cults springing out of Christianity (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.)

So, ever since the Protestant Reformation, the central and major theological disagreement with Roman Catholicism has centered on the manner of one's salvation ...

Protestants claim that people are "saved" or "justified" by "faith alone".

Roman Catholics claim that "salvation" is by "faith + works".

So, our original question can be restated as ...

"Is Salvation by 'Faith Alone' [Protestant] or by 'Faith+Works' [Roman Catholic]?"

OK. But, just how important is the difference?

We need to understand from the outset that this is no small theological matter. The difference here concerns salvation and the gospel itself.

The Roman Catholic Church certainly recognizes the importance of the matter. It has an official outstanding anathema (or curse), set forth by *The Council of Trent*, the last major

dogmatic council of the Roman Catholic Church, against anyone who believes that he is saved or justified by *“faith alone”*.

Protestants, likewise, cling tenaciously to *“Sola Fide”*, or salvation by *“faith alone”*, the great rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation and the most central doctrine of Protestantism. Protestants hold that to add any *“work”* to *“faith”* as necessary for attaining salvation is to totally distort and undermine the entire Gospel of Jesus Christ, as attested by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians ...

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8-9)

The point of controversy in Galatians was that Paul’s opponents, the Judaizers, were attempting to add the *“work”* of circumcision to faith as the means of attaining salvation. Their teaching was ...

“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

But Paul calls the addition of this one seemingly minor *“work”* of circumcision to faith in order to be saved – *“another gospel”* – and later brings a stinging imprecation against the Judaizers for proposing it (Galatians 5:12).

So the Question ...

“Is Salvation by ‘Faith Alone’ [Protestant] or by ‘Faith+Works’ [Roman Catholic]?”

... is a very central and very important question, a question involving the very heart of the gospel itself and the very means of one’s salvation. It is THE main difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism and is a very real and very crucial difference.

OK, it’s important! But ...

... WHY is there such a great difference on such a crucial and important issue as this in the first place?

Many of the differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics arise in part or in whole due to the different *binding authorities* recognized by each.

Protestants recognize only the authority of the Bible as binding.

Roman Catholics not only recognize the binding authority of the Bible – but also ...

The authority of the Apocrypha – a set of books written between Old Testament and New Testament times (but not included in the Hebrew Canon of Old Testament books) ...

Church tradition and the Councils and Decrees of the Church ...

Proclamations by the Pope, especially when speaking *ex cathedra* (literally, 'from the chair' of St. Peter by apostolic succession)

As we will see in "II." below, the main difference in the matter of salvation by "faith alone" or by "faith + works" primarily arises from the proper interpretation of a seeming disagreement between the Apostles Paul and James on the manner of one's salvation. We will use this seeming disagreement as the basis for our salvation by "Faith Alone" or "Faith + Works" discussion.

[Note: In looking at the following quotes, the word "justified" can be used interchangeably with the word "saved". We will say more on this later.]

What are some Scriptural references used by each side for its viewpoint?

Protestants cite the Apostle Paul very emphatically, and repeatedly, stating that salvation is attained by "faith alone" ...

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."
(Romans 3:28)

"knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."
(Galatians 2:16)

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

"What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, 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 (Romans 4:1-4)

**Roman Catholics point out that the Apostle James, in James 2:14-26,
says otherwise**

- 14 *“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*
15 *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,*
16 *and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*
17 *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*
18 *But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*
19 *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!*
20 *But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*
21 *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*
22 *Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?*
23 *And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.*
24 *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*
25 *Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*
26 *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”*

In framing their arguments about whether one is saved by “faith alone” or “faith + works”, Protestants usually cite the passages of Paul and Roman Catholics frequently cite the passage by James.

So ... Is there a REAL Biblical contradiction here?

***Are Paul and James really at loggerheads on such a basic item
as the means of one’s salvation?***

If one makes only a cursory reading of the passages cited above, it would seem to be so. But, if you will bear with us, you will see that there really is no disagreement at all between James and Paul on the manner of one’s salvation and that what James says is entirely consistent with what Paul says, and vice versa.

But, before moving to that, let’s first deal with the question ...

“Does it have to be either “Faith Alone” or “Faith + Works”? Is there any room for reasonable compromise here?

We would insist that there is no room for compromise here for two reasons:

First, from the viewpoint of logic, we are forced to admit that we cannot be saved by both “Faith Alone” and “Faith + Works” at the same time. In other words, Protestants and Roman Catholics can’t both be right on this issue. It is possible that they could both be wrong, but it is not logically possible that they can both be right! The first law of logic is the Law of Non-Contradiction which states that something cannot be “A” and “Not-A” at the same time. One simply cannot be saved by “faith alone” and “faith + works” at the same time.

Second, if Scripture is indeed infallible, then there is no room for compromise between the two viewpoints. If Protestants and Roman Catholics were both correct *in their respective interpretations* of what Scripture says, then we would have a valid and demonstrable Scriptural contradiction of major consequence on the foremost issue of the Bible. But, an “infallible” Scripture, by definition, cannot contradict itself. So, and this is *the* crucial point, if Scripture is infallible, then someone, either Protestants or Roman Catholics, must be *reading and interpreting* their Bible wrongly.

Accordingly, from the viewpoints of both logic and an infallible Scripture, we can see that there is no room for compromise here. It must be one way or the other. Either Protestants are right and we are saved or justified by “*Faith Alone*” or Roman Catholics are right and we are saved or justified by “*Faith + Works*”. Their claims are mutually exclusive, and to accept one, you must reject the other.

OK. But, how then do we go about answering the question “Who is right?”

How do we go about determining whether salvation is by “Faith Alone” or by “Faith + Works”?

As I am writing this paper as a Protestant who believes that a person is saved by “*Faith Alone*”, the burden of proof falls upon me to Biblically and logically defend my viewpoint and show that James’s passage is complimentary with and not contradictory to Paul’s assertions that salvation is by “faith alone” – and to do so in a clear manner, without using superficial rationalizations, Scripture twisting, and unwarranted allegories.

And, since only the Bible itself (without the Apocrypha) is recognized by both Protestants and Roman Catholics as an infallible source of faith and practice, we will use it as our exclusive interpreter and guide to the truth.

So ... To answer “The Question”,

“Is Salvation by ‘Faith Alone’ [Protestant] or by ‘Faith+Works’ [Roman Catholic]?”

we will proceed in the following manner ...

Having already shown ...

Why there is such a great difference on such a crucial and important issue in the first place
... and ...

That there can be no such thing as a *real* Biblical contradiction

That there is no room for reasonable compromise here

We must conclude ...

That one side must be interpreting their Bible incorrectly ...

... To answer the question “Which side?”

We will follow a Six-Step process:

Step 1: Determine the Nature and Scope of the question.

Step 2: State the Alleged Disagreement Clearly

Step 3: Define the Key Terms to be used in our Discussion for the Sake of Mutual Understanding

Step 4: Take a much closer look at “*Faith*” itself – Its components and its various uses in Scripture – and clearly distinguish between a living, saving faith and a “*dead*” faith

Step 5: Determine exactly which arguments, issues, audiences, and “Essential” theological errors Paul and James are respectively addressing

Step 6: Exegete line by line the passage of James’ “seeming” contradiction with Paul on the concept of “salvation by ‘faith alone’” and scripturally and logically resolve the two viewpoints – without using superficial rationalizations, Scripture twisting, or uncalled-for allegories

Step 1: Determine the Nature and Scope of the Question

God has given us a wonderful written record of His nature, principles, standards, thoughts and doctrine in the Bible.

And like the wonderful God that authored it, God's word is in many respects very "simple" and easy to understand and in other respects very "complex". Because of this, reading, studying and meditating on God's word can be carried out on many levels, some "simple" and some "complex". Indeed, reading, studying and meditating on God's word can in many respects be compared to prospecting and mining for gold.

By that we mean that ...

In many cases, God's word is "simple" in the sense that even an uneducated man reading it or hearing it preached or explained can gain a necessary understanding of its vital points – that he is a sinner, that God judges sin, that he needs a Savior, and that God has provided a Savior for him in the Lord Jesus Christ if he will but put his faith and trust in Him. Finding these very essential truths in God's word by simple reading or hearing can be likened to prospecting for gold and finding some valuable nuggets just lying there on the surface of the ground. They are easily seen and picked up without a great deal of effort.

But some truths from God's word are much more "complex" and can only be gotten at by extensive study using original language meanings, contexts, historical knowledge, and so on.

For instance, the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, but the idea and explanation of the Trinity is there nonetheless. It took the church a long time and much reasoning to develop the doctrine of the Trinity. Another example would be arriving at an understanding of the dual natures of Jesus Christ (human and divine) and their relationship to each other in His person.

In the cases of developing the doctrines of the Trinity and the relationship of the dual natures of Christ, the church had to do some really deep and extensive "underground" mining to get at the gold of God's truth. Truth (or gold) gotten at in this manner is just as valid and valuable as the gold nuggets lying on the surface of the ground – it's just harder to get at.

Other truths lie, in varying degrees, between the extremes of picking up nuggets lying on the surface of the ground and needing deep and extensive underground mining. These "middle" truths have to be more or less "strip-mined", i.e., they require more effort and study and meditation than just walking around on the surface picking up loose nuggets, but not as much effort as developing the doctrines of the Trinity and the dual natures of Christ and their relationship to each other.

Our present question – "Is a person saved by 'Faith Alone' or by 'Faith + Works'?" – is an example of the "strip-mined" type of truth

Because it is a question of the deeper "strip-minded" type of truth, answering it will require more effort, study and meditation than just a cursory reading the Bible (or walking around on the surface picking up loose nuggets) but not as much effort as

developing a new and complex theological doctrine by long and extensive underground mining.

One final word on interpreting the Bible ...

As an adult Sunday School teacher, I am often asked, “You say ‘this’ and others say ‘that’. How do we know whom to believe?”

My answer is “Don’t believe either of us. But be like the ‘fair-minded’ Bereans whom Paul commended because ...

‘they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.’” (Acts 17:11)

I can do no less than the Apostle Paul and tell you that in your search for the truth of whether salvation is by “faith” or by “faith + works” you should search the Scriptures rigorously to see if the things which I say are “so”. That is why we will quote a great deal of Scripture in defending our viewpoint.

OK ... let’s do a little “strip mining” ...

Step 2: State the Disagreement Clearly

We saw above that our Question # 12 –

“What are the main differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics? Are they important?”

– could be restated as ...

“Is Salvation by ‘Faith Alone’ [Protestant] or by ‘Faith+Works’ [Roman Catholic]?”

Stated a little differently ...

“Is a person saved by “Faith Alone” or by “Faith+Works”

When we use the word “*saved*” we mean the process by which a sinful person comes to be accounted or reckoned as righteous before a holy God that cannot abide the sight of sin and must by His very nature move to punish both it and the sinner. We will shortly see that a word which can be used interchangeably with “*saved*” in our discussion is the Biblical term “*justified*”, used in some of Paul’s quotes above, a word which we will look at in greater detail in Step 3.

Again, Protestants say that we are “saved” (or “justified”) by “Faith Alone”, while Roman Catholics say we are saved by “Faith + Works” (and have attached an official anathema, or curse, to anyone who dares to say that they are saved by “Faith Alone”). Again, both sides recognize that the difference here is very real, very crucial, and at the very heart of the Gospel message of salvation itself.

Step 3: Define the Key Terms that will be used in our Discussion for the Sake of Mutual Understanding

There are several very important words and terms that we will use a great deal in our discussion and want to make sure that we have mutual understanding of what they mean.

They are ...

Salvation by “Works”

Salvation by “Faith” or “Faith Alone”

Salvation by “Faith + Works”

“Justification”

God’s “Grace”

“Sanctification”

The “Means of Grace”

A “Professor” of faith versus a “Possessor” of faith

Given the nature of our Question, we will naturally have to spend a bit more time fleshing out exactly what a living, saving “*faith*” is and means (as distinguished from a “*dead*” faith), and what the place and role of “*works*” is in the Protestant view of things.

This said, let’s move on to our definitions ...

a. Key Term: Salvation by “Works”

“*Works*” are actions or good deeds performed for which a reward is merited, earned or conferred. Neither Roman Catholics nor Protestants believe that one is saved by their “works” alone.

Salvation by “*works*” is mostly found in Far Eastern religions and religious philosophies, where “works” are a means by which one might advance to a higher level of existence.

For example, one's "karma" is determined by one's "works" on earth. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines "karma" as "the force generated by a person's actions held in Hinduism and Buddhism to perpetuate transmigration and in its ethical consequences to determine his destiny in his next existence."

b. Key Term: Salvation by "Faith" or "Faith Alone"

Christian "*faith*" is belief in, trust in, reliance upon and life commitment to Jesus Christ for one's salvation. The Bible defines "*faith*" in Hebrews 11:1 as "*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*" Protestants believe that we are saved by "*Faith Alone*" in Jesus Christ. "*Faith Alone*" means that faith in Jesus Christ is all that is necessary for one's salvation.

What, then, is the role of "works" in the Protestant view of salvation?

Though Protestants hold that "works" are not necessary for salvation, Protestants do believe and hold that "works" are a necessary and vital part of the Christian's life and are the sure proof and evidence of their having a living, saving faith.

But – and this is the crucial difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics – for Protestants "good works" come after saving faith has been imparted as a "gift" from God and salvation attained by the exercise of it. In other words, good "works" have nothing to do with the attainment of salvation itself, but are the sure result of, evidence for, and proof of one's having a living, saving faith and salvation. This is because a person who has a living, saving faith will inexorably, and without fail, come to produce "good works". He will, so to speak, come to "bear the fruit" of his salvation – which are advancement in spiritual maturity, growth in bearing "the fruit of the Spirit" and the performance of good works. There is no such thing as a barren or fruitless "Christian".

That every true Christian will produce good works is clearly shown in Ephesians 2:10 ...

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

A very good analogy of the Protestant view of the relationship of "faith" and "works" is found in the relationship of a tree and its fruit (an analogy that was also used by our Lord). A living healthy tree will produce good fruit. But it is the tree that produces the fruit and not the other way around. Like the tree, a person who has a living, saving faith will come to produce the "fruit" of good works, but just as the tree produces the fruit, and not the other way around, so it is a living, saving "faith" that produces good works and not the other way around.

That all true Christians, i.e., all those that have a living, saving faith, will bear the fruit of good works is also attested by our Lord, who, in a warning of false prophets to come, stated ...

“Beware of false prophets; who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:15-20)

There are two types of “fruit” that every true Christian faith produces ...

1. The “*fruit of the Spirit*” – Wherein God’s Holy Spirit works spiritual maturity and advancement within us ...

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22)

2. The fruit of “*good works*” – Which flow out of a living, saving faith and provide the evidence of one’s possessing a living a saving faith

“I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18)

Note well that

“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Those who “say” or “*profess*” they are Christians but have no “*fruit*” to show for it have only a barren and “*dead*” faith (as James calls it) and will ultimately be cast out and thrown into the fire.

A true Christian, one with a living, saving faith, will always bear the “*fruit*” of “good works”. We saw above that “*every good tree bears good fruit*”, and, as our Lord tells us directly below all those possessing a living, saving faith will “*abide in Him*” and will, thereby, “*bear much fruit*” ...

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned ... By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:1-8)

Thus, a living, saving faith must, and always will, produce the fruit of “good works”, because one with a living, saving faith “*abides*” in Jesus, the source of those good works.

Those with a “dead” faith do not abide in Him and are barren and unproductive. Thus, “fruits” and “good works” are the evidence before men of a one’s having a living, saving faith.

[Note: Not all people who strive to obey God’s commands and do good works have a living, saving faith – for example, the Pharisees – But all who do have a living, saving faith will strive to obey His commands and do good works for Him.]

It is crucial that we make clear the difference between the two kinds of “faith” spoken of in the Bible

We have said that the Bible recognizes two kinds of “faith”, a living, saving faith and a “dead” faith, and that our Lord warns us repeatedly about distinguishing between them. [We will have more to say on all this in Step 4].

But for now let us say that ...

A living, saving faith has four essential elements ...

1. There must be an object and set of beliefs in which to place one’s faith ...
2. The object and the set of beliefs in which one places their faith must be real, true and correct. No matter how sincerely or earnestly one believes in a stone idol, his faith in it is a “dead” faith because it is a faith based on a false object and false set of propositions about it.
3. The person expressing faith must themselves, at a minimum, proclaim or give their mental assent that the object and set of beliefs are true ...
4. In addition to giving their mental assent to the truth of the object and their set of beliefs concerning it, they must come to fully embrace the object and set of propositions about the object, i.e., they must come to fully believe in, trust in, rely upon and make a life commitment to Jesus Christ.

A living, saving, faith must have all four of these Essential components.

A “dead” faith, on the other hand ...

... is one in which the first three Essential elements are present, but the fourth is lacking. This kind of faith is really nothing more than a mere intellectual or mental assent to an object and a set of propositions about it. Not being a faith that is “fully embraced” and acted upon (i.e., it is not really relied upon, trusted in, acted upon and fully committed to), it is what James calls a “dead” faith, which produces nothing and does its bearer no good at all.

Again, because it is such a crucial point, the difference between Essential 3, giving a *mere mental assent* to the truth of the object and set of beliefs about it, and Essential 4, *coming to fully embrace* (i.e., coming to fully trust in, rely upon, act upon and make a life commitment to the object and set of beliefs) is the main difference between having a living, saving faith and a “dead” faith. We will also come to see that a “dead” faith is the type of faith addressed by James his James 2:14-26 passage.

c. Key Term: Salvation by “Faith + Works”

In Roman Catholic doctrine, “works” are a necessary accompaniment to “faith” for the attainment of salvation. In Roman Catholicism “faith” or “faith alone” is, by itself, not enough for salvation. Faith in Christ must be joined by something else, a “work” or “works” and participation in all the graces (sacraments) of the Church that are necessary to attain and maintain salvation. Salvation thus comes through a combination of “faith” and “works”. They must both be present. Hence, in Roman Catholicism one is saved by “*Faith + Works*”.

d. Key Words: A “Professor” of faith versus a “Possessor” of faith

A “Possessor” of a living, saving faith is one who ACTUALLY HAS or POSSESSES a living, saving faith.

A “Professor” of a living, saving faith is one who SAYS or claims that he has a living, saving faith and may or may not actually have or possess it. “*Saying*” (or “*professing*”) that one has a saving faith is one thing, actually “*possessing*” it is another.

This is why James tells us that good works are the evidence of a person’s actually *possessing* a living, saving faith and that a person who “*says he has faith but does not have works*” is a Christian in name only, and not in fact. He is self-deceived.

Of such a person James asks ...

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14)

The answer is “No”, his “faith” cannot save him, because he has what James calls a barren, unproductive, “dead” faith which does him no good at all. His faith is really nothing more than a mere mental assent to a set of propositions. It lacks the fourth essential element of a saving faith, that of fully embracing the object and propositions of his faith by *trusting in, relying upon, acting upon* and *making a life commitment* to them

It is very important to note in our discussion that a person with a living, saving faith (i.e., a Possessor) will be a radically changed person.

Indeed, the Bible tells us that a person with a living, saving faith will have been...

... *“born again”* ... be a *“new creation”* ... be a *“new man”* ... have an entirely new *“heart”* ... and have been *adopted* into God’s family, *united to Christ* and *indwelt by the Holy Spirit*.

Given all this, a true Christian (a “Possessor” of a true living faith) will, without fail, come to bear spiritual fruit, produce good “works”, and strive for obedience – all of which are the prime evidences before men of their possessing a living, saving faith. This is why James can say that *“faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”*. A “faith” without “works” is a *“dead”* faith.

Our Lord repeatedly and specifically warns mere “Professors” of self-deception in this area ...

“But why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God I thank You that I am not like other men – extorters, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’” (Luke 18: 9-14)

Our Lord Jesus likewise clearly establishes the link between true “love” for Him (i.e., having a saving faith in Him) and *obedience* to His commands four times in John 14

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. (John 14:15)

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” (John 14:21)

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word” (John 14:23)

“He who does not love Me does not keep My words” (John 14:24)

Paul similarly warns us about the tie between obedience to Jesus’s commands and having a living, saving faith – and not being self-deceived on this point ...

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

“For as many as have sinned without the law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified ...)” (Romans 2:12-13)

We can thus see that “good works”, spiritual “fruit”, and striving to “obey” Jesus’s commands are the three great evidences of one’s actually possessing a living, saving faith. Again, not all who do “good works” have a living, saving faith (the Pharisees and the Judaizers, for example), but all who have a living saving faith will produce “good works”.

All of the above warnings from James, Paul, and our Lord are precisely why the Apostles Peter and Paul both command all “*professors*” of faith to diligently “*make your call and election sure*” and to “*test*” and “*examine*” themselves to see if they truly are “*in the faith*”.

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10)

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

This said, let’s return to defining our “key” words

e. Key Word: Justification

Justification is a legal, forensic term used to describe the one-time declaration by God in which He, by judicial decree, legally *imputes* (i.e., *legally transfers, accounts or reckons*) our sins to Christ on the cross and also legally *imputes* (*legally transfers, accounts or*

reckons) the righteousness of Christ to our own personal account. By these two imputations ...

The penalty is paid for our sins by Christ on the cross and we are declared “Not Guilty” before God’s bar of justice... and ...

The righteousness of Christ is imputed or credited to our account such that when God looks at us in a judicial sense, He not only sees that we are “Not Guilty”, but He also sees that we are covered by the righteousness of Christ (and not by our sins, faults, and failings). We note that this righteousness is a “foreign” righteousness that comes from another (Jesus Christ) and is not an “inherent” righteousness of our own.

Justification is the central link in Paul’s “golden chain” of salvation (described in Romans 8) and is what most people really mean when speaking of being “saved” ...

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8:28-30)

And they are correct to speak of it in that manner, for Justification is the crucial point at which God judicially pardons our sins (as paid for by Christ on the cross) and legally declares us to be righteous in His sight (again, not inherently righteous in and of ourselves, but covered with the ‘foreign’ righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to our account). It is the act in which we are truly transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and come to have peace with God. Justification is the hinge of our salvation.

The immediate aftereffects of our Justification by God involves our being adopted into God’s family, united to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

f. Key Word: Justification and God’s “Grace”

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

We can see from the Ephesians quote that “*grace*” is an undeserved, unmerited, unearned, and unasked-for “*gift*” from God. Our “*faith*” itself, the faith “*through*” which we “*have been saved*”, is a free “*gift*” from God – and, very specifically, is “*not of yourselves*” and “*not of works*” ... “*lest anyone should boast.*” “*Faith*” did not come to us as a reward conferred for something that we had done.

It must be understood that ...

... “grace” and “works” are total opposites. Again, if something comes to us by God’s “grace”, it cannot have come to us as a reward conferred for something we have done or as an debt paid for some work or deed that we have performed ...

“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.” (Romans 11:5-6)

*“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.”
(Romans 4:4)*

If the “faith” which “saves” us comes to us as a “gift” by God’s “grace” and had nothing to do with any “work” that we performed, then any “boasting” on our part is excluded.

Confirm ...

“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” (Romans 10:27-28)

Note well that Paul’s ‘*conclusion*’ of this whole line of thought is ...

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

That salvation is purely of God’s “grace” and “mercy” and has nothing to do with any work on the part of man or by the will of man is confirmed by both our Lord and by the Apostles Paul and John ...

“Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (Jesus Christ, John 6:65)

“For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion’. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” (Romans 9:15-16)

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”. (John 1:12-13)

One can readily see that both faith and justification (salvation) are entirely of God’s “grace” and God’s doing. We were entirely passive in it.

g. Key Word: Sanctification

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

The word “*Sanctification*” is derived from Hebrew and Greek words which mean “*to set apart [from common use] ... to be made holy*”.

Having been justified, adopted into God’s family, united to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Christian begins the process of their sanctification – a lifelong struggle against sin and for holiness, a struggle accomplished through and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sanctification is the “link” described in God’s “golden chain” of salvation (Romans 6:28-30) in which we were “*predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son*”. It will produce a life of “*good works*”, obedience to Christ’s commands and growth in spiritual maturity [i.e., growth in “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” – the “fruits of the Spirit” listed in Galatians 5:22].

Unlike Justification, where we can never be more “justified” than we were at the moment God first “justified” us, all Christians will increase in their Sanctification over the course of their lives.

Also unlike Justification, which is God’s act alone, both God and man work together in our Sanctification process. The Christian works very hard in his sanctification process, struggling and striving to put off sin and put on holiness, but he works only because God has first worked, and continues to work, in him ...

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12-13)

The Christian is to “work out” the implications of his salvation (not work to earn his salvation) precisely because “God” first “works in” him “*both to will and to do for His good pleasure*”. The Christian himself strenuously labors and struggles throughout the sanctification process, but does so only because God has first worked in him the desire (“to will”) and ability (“to do”) so.

h. Key Term: The “Means of Grace”

God imparts His “*grace*” to us through what are called the “*means of grace*”. The primary “*means of grace*” are Bible reading and meditation, prayer, and worship.

Indeed, God initially imparted His “gift” of “faith” to us through our “*hearing*” His word

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17)

It must be understood that the “*means of grace*” are vitally necessary for the spiritual growth and maturity (i.e., sanctification) of every Christian. Our Lord Jesus stresses this repeatedly:

In His High Priestly prayer, our Lord specifically asks God to sanctify us through our use of His word ...

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” (John 17:17)

On another occasion He specifically told us that we can do “*nothing*” by ourselves and that to progress in our sanctification and bear fruit we must “*abide*” in Him – which we do by the regular use of the “*means of grace*” ...

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5)

The word “*nothing*” is fairly clear. You should never forget that the sum total of what you can accomplish spiritually on your own is “*nothing*” and that you must regularly use “*the means of grace*” if you are to mature and develop fruit in your Christian life.

Answering the Question

Having determined the Nature and Scope of the Question in Step 1, having “clearly” stated the Alleged Disagreement in Step 2, and having defined the Key Terms to be used in our Discussion for the Sake of Mutual Understanding in Step 3, we are now ready to proceed to Steps 4, 5, and 6, in which we will fully reconcile the statements of the Apostle James with the statements of the Apostle Paul to show that there is no contradiction between them and that salvation is indeed by “*faith alone*”.

In those Steps, we will ...

Step 4: Take a much closer look at “*Faith*” itself – Its components and its various uses in Scripture – and clearly distinguish between a living, saving faith and a “*dead*” faith

Step 5: Determine exactly which arguments, issues and theological errors Paul and James are respectively addressing, and the audiences to which they are addressed

Step 6: Exegete line by line the passage of James’s “seeming” contradiction with Paul on the concept of “salvation by faith alone” and scripturally and

logically resolve the two viewpoints – without using superficial rationalizations, Scripture twisting, or uncalled-for allegories

Let us proceed ...

Step 4: Take a close in-depth look at “faith” itself: What exactly is it? What elements make up “faith”? Are there different types of faith? If so, how do they differ? How does one gain a true, living, saving faith?

Both Paul and James repeatedly use the word “faith” in their quotes above on salvation. But do they use it in the same sense? Some Biblical terms, like many other words, can have different meanings or shades of meaning when used in different contexts. “*Faith*” is a good example. The Bible, for instance, speaks of two different types of faith ...

1. There is a living, saving “faith” ... a “faith” that attains salvation

“For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8)

2. And, there is also, as James tells us, a “dead” faith which does not attain salvation

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17)

So, like other words, the word “*faith*” can be used in different contexts to mean two very different things – either a living, saving “*faith*” or a dead “*faith*”.

That is why it is very important to look at both Paul’s and James’s use of the word “faith,” and to determine ...

Which type of “faith” each is speaking of

The audiences they are speaking to ... and ...

The issue which each is addressing ...

All of these considerations are essential “keys” to understanding and resolving the seeming contradiction between Paul and James on the role of “works” in salvation – because in their respective contexts Paul and James are speaking of different types of faith and addressing entirely different issues and audiences:

Paul’s passages use the first type of faith, a living, saving faith, and addresses the issue of the cause or ground of our salvation

James’s passage uses the second type of faith, a “dead” faith, a faith that “*does not have works*”, to show that if one “says” they have a saving faith but do not

have the evidences of “good works” to back up their profession, they are a self-deceived hypocrite and have only a barren and useless “dead” faith that does them no good at all.

It is very important to keep in mind that a person with a living, saving faith will be a radically changed person. Again, the Bible tells us that a person with a living, saving faith – has been “born again” ... is a “new creation” ... is a “new man” ... has an entirely new “heart” ... has been adopted into God’s family ... has been united to Christ ... and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He will, as a result, without fail, come to bear spiritual fruit and produce good “works” – which are the prime evidences before men and to themselves of their possessing a living, saving faith. Thus does James rightly say that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”. A “faith” without “works” is a “dead” faith, not a living, saving faith, and does not attain salvation.

This is precisely why, as we saw above, our Lord has repeatedly warned us against self-deception in this area and the Apostles Peter and Paul have commanded us to “test” and “examine” ourselves to “make our call and election sure” and to see if we “are in the faith”.

[Note: We would refer you here to our series “Pain, Suffering, Death, and the ‘WHYS?’ Thereof”, Paper # 8: “How Can I Know for Sure That I am a Christian?” – which can help you to “test” and “examine” yourself as commanded by both Peter and Paul in 2 Peter :10, 2 and Corinthians 13:5]

So, with this in mind, let’s take a more in-depth look at the nature and composition of both a “living, saving” faith and a “dead” faith.

I. The nature and composition of a “living, saving” faith

A living, saving faith has four “Essential” elements or components ...

Essential 1: There must some “Object”, i.e., there must be some being or knowledge and a set of propositions about the object, in which to place one’s faith. You cannot have faith in “nothing”. There must be an object and a set of propositions in which to have faith.

Essential 2: It should go without saying that in order to have a living, saving faith, the object and the set of propositions in which we place our faith must be “real”, “true”, and correct. If the object of our faith is not real or the propositions concerning it are not true or correct, then any faith expressed in it will be false or “dead”. Again, no matter how sincere we are in our faith, if the object and set of propositions about our faith are not real or true, our faith is a “dead” faith.

Essential 3: Not only must the objects and set of propositions of a living, saving faith be real and true, but we also must personally give our “Mental Assent”, that they are real,

correct and true. By the very meaning of the word, we cannot have “faith” in something that we ourselves do not accept to be true.

Essential 4: The object and set of propositions about our faith must be “fully embraced” by us. By “*fully embraced*” we mean that we must come to have not only a belief or mental assent that they are true, but also have come to trust in, rely upon, act upon, and make a life commitment of obedience to them. A true, living, saving faith will affect, and engage, every aspect of our entire being – our emotions and our will as well as our intellect

This final Essential cannot be overemphasized – For in most cases, it is the difference between a living, saving faith and a “dead” faith, and many are self-deceived concerning it. Indeed, James, in his passage, is addressing people who lack this fourth “Essential” element, but “*say*” they have a living saving faith.

II. The nature, composition and deficiencies of a “dead” faith

A “dead” faith is a deficient faith that does not save because it lacks one or more of the Essential components of a living, saving faith – either Essential 2 or Essential 4

An Essential 2 deficiency is one in which the object and/or vital parts of the set of propositions about the object are either false, non-existent, or incorrect

An Essential 4 deficiency is one in which the one who “says” they have a living, saving faith has never moved beyond the mere mental assent of Essential 3 to “fully embrace” the faith in an Essential 4 manner

Examples of Essential 2 “dead” faith deficiencies would include –

Idol worship ...

Islamic-fundamentalist suicide-bombers ...

Mormons who believe in the historical existence and greatness of Jesus Christ, a real and true object, but hold so many fatally flawed teachings about Him that their Jesus-“object” is not the real Jesus of the Bible, but a flawed and idolatrous figment of their imaginations ...

The Pharisees and Judaizers of Jesus’s day who, along with Roman Catholics of today, sought salvation by “faith + works” ...

Paul, in Romans, provides us a prime example of an Essential 2 deficiency as he laments over his Jewish brethren who have a “*zeal for God*” which is false and misplaced because it is incorrect and “*not according to knowledge*” ...

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law of righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:1-4)

The main Example of an Essential 4 “dead” faith deficiency is –

A hypocrite who “says” or claims that they have a living, saving faith but have never advanced beyond a mere mental assent to a set of propositions to “fully embrace” their “faith”.

This the topic that James addresses in his James 2:14-26 passage.

In his passage, the Apostle James repeatedly defines a “dead” faith as a faith which produces no good works ...

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:30)

*“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”
(James 2:33)*

*“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”
(James 2:39)*

James can say that a “faith without works is dead” because, as we said earlier (and it bears repeating), a person who has a living, saving faith will be a changed person – They will have been “*born again*” ... made into “*new creation*” ... be a “*new man*” ... have a new “*heart*” ... have been *adopted* into God’s family ... be *united* to Christ ... and have the very Spirit of God *dwelling within* them. As such, the person with a living, saving faith will most assuredly come to produce “good works” – because that is what a saved person with a living, saving faith will do. Thus does Paul write ...

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

People who lack Essential 4 usually profess to believe in Jesus and accept as true all the correct propositions concerning Him. But their faith is “*dead*” because it never moves beyond the mere “*mental assent*” of Essential 3 to “*fully embracing*” the propositions of the faith by coming to trust in, rely upon, act upon, and make a life commitment of obedience to them (the vitals of Essential 4).

One of the clearest signs of a “dead” faith is a lack of concern for obedience to Christ’s commands.

As we saw above, our Lord Himself especially, and repeatedly, stressed striving for obedience to His commands as a sign of love for Him and repeatedly warns mere “*professors*” of faith against self-deception in this area ...

*“But why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?
(Luke 6:46)*

*“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.”
(John 14:21)*

Matthew Henry says of them ...

“We have here the conclusion of this long and excellent sermon, the scope of which is to show the indispensable necessity of obedience to the commands of Christ ...

They think they shall go to heaven, because they have been of good repute among professors of religion, have kept fasts, and given alms, and have been preferred in the church; as if this would atone for their reigning pride, worldliness, and sensuality, and want of love for God and man ...

Secret haunts of sin, kept up under the cloak of a visible profession, will be the ruin of hypocrites. Living in known sin nullifies man’s pretensions, be they ever so specious ...

He never did know them, for He always knew them to be hypocrites, and rotten at heart, as He did Judas ...

At God’s bar, a profession of religion will not bear out any man in the practice and indulgence of sin; therefore let every one who names the name of Christ, depart from all iniquity”

As we said, a true, living, saving faith will affect, and engage, every aspect of our entire being – our emotions and our will as well as our intellect – and, being a “*new creation*” with a “*new heart*”, the Christian will strive for obedience to the laws and tenets of our faith and produce good works to glorify God.

Again, the danger of self-deception in this area is why both the Apostles Peter and Paul command Christians (including ourselves) to diligently “*test*” and “*examine*” ourselves, and our lives, to make sure that we “*are in the faith*” and are not self-deceived Essential 3 believers only ...

*“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure”
(II Peter 1:10)*

*“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (II
Corinthians 13:5)*

A right understanding of these verses leads us to a *simple, guided, and positive* self-examination to see if the evidences of the graces of salvation (such as “good works”) are indeed present in our lives and are increasing over the years.

[We refer you again to our series “Pain, Suffering, Death, and the ‘WHYS?’ Thereof”, Paper # 8: “How Can I Know for Sure That I am a Christian?” – which can help you to “test” and “examine” yourself as commanded by both Peter and Paul in 2 Peter :10, 2 and Corinthians 13:5]

Having taken a closer look at “Faith” and its various meanings and usages in Scripture, we are now ready to proceed to Step 5 ...

Step 5: Determine exactly which arguments, issues, errors and audiences are being respectively addressed by both Paul and James

Let’s first review our verses in which ...

Paul very emphatically and repeatedly states that salvation is attained by “faith alone” ...

*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”
(Romans 3:28)*

*“knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”
(Galatians 2:16)*

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, 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 (Romans 4:1-4)

and James writes ...

- 27 *“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*
28 *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,*
29 *and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*
30 *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*
31 *But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*
32 *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!*
33 *But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*
34 *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*
35 *Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?*
36 *And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.*
37 *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*
38 *Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*
39 *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”*

Again, Protestants use Paul’s verses to argue that salvation is by *“Faith Alone”*, while Roman Catholics use James’s passage to argue that salvation is by *“Faith + Works”*.

In Step 5 ...

... we will look closely at the text and context of both Paul’s and James’s passages to determine ...

The issue that is being addressed by each ...

The audience that is being addressed by each ...

The type of faith (*“living”* or *“dead”*) that is being referred to by each

Which *“Essential”* of faith theological error is being addressed by each

– all of which will go a long way toward resolving the *apparent* contradiction between Paul and James.

First and foremost, it is very important to determine the root issue being addressed by each ...

In all his quotes, the Apostle Paul is addressing the ROOT ISSUE of the CAUSE of our justification and the GROUND on which our salvation rests.

Paul is confronting the Judaizers, the Pharisees and others who want to add a work or works to faith as necessary for salvation. He confronts people who claim things like

“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

In this particular instance (Acts 15:1), the Judaizers were seeking to add the “work” of circumcision as an additional necessary cause or ground of salvation (which would make it an Essential 2 theological error).

In all his passages, Paul repeatedly and unequivocally states that we are accounted as righteous before a holy God by *‘faith alone’* and that *‘works’* have no ground at all as a cause, joint-cause, or ground of our salvation.

James, in his passage, is addressing an entirely different issue ...

James does not at all address the CAUSE or GROUND of our justification or salvation, but the EVIDENCE and PROOF of it.

James is addressing hypocrites who “say” that they have a living saving faith, when they have no evidence at all to show that they do. Indeed, James opens his passage with ...

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

As we said, a true, living, saving faith will affect, and engage, every aspect of our entire being – our emotions and our will as well as our intellect – and we will, therefore, most certainly come to strive for obedience to the laws and tenets of our faith. A living saving faith will so change a person and they will come to bear the fruit of spiritual maturity and produce good works – both which are the evidences and proof of one’s having a living saving faith.

So, whereas Paul is addressing the issue of the CAUSE or GROUND of our salvation, James is addressing the EVIDENCE and PROOF of our salvation.

Paul is addressing an *Essential 2* theological error, that of whether salvation come by “Faith Alone” or by “Faith + Works”

James is addressing an *Essential 4* theological error, one in which faith stops at a mere a mere mental assent to an object and set of propositions about that object (“Essential 3”) and fails to “*fully embrace*” the object and set of propositions of their faith by trusting in, relying upon, acting upon and making a full life commitment of obedience to them (“Essential 4”). James addresses people who, being self-deceived, rest their hopes of salvation on a mere profession of faith, merely agreeing to a set of propositions, and nothing more. Theirs is, therefore, a “dead” faith.

James warns them ...

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”
(James 1:22)

The Apostles Peter and Paul are not at variance at all with the Apostle James on this warning. Peter and Paul also warn of self-deception in this area and command us to look for the proof of our salvation in our deeds and works ...

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure” (II Peter 1:10)

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (II Corinthians 13:5)

“if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work ...” (Galatians 6:3-4)

As we will see in Step 6, both Paul and James teach that a living, saving faith alone is the CAUSE or GROUND of our salvation and that works are the consequent RESULT and PROOF of it.

To recap Step 5 ...

... much of the apparent contradiction between Paul and James can be reconciled by understanding that Paul and James are addressing different issues, different audiences, different types of faith and different Essential errors ...

Issue Addressed Paul – The Cause or Ground of our salvation

James – The Evidence and Proof of our salvation

Audience Addressed Paul – Those who would add a “work” to “faith” as a necessary prerequisite for salvation

James – Those who “say” or claim that they have a living, saving

faith, but have no works or evidence to show for it

**Type of Faith
Addressed**

Paul – A “living, saving” faith

James – A “dead” faith

**Essential Error
Addressed**

Paul – Essential 2: A faulty “Faith + Works” salvation proposition

James – Essential 4: Stopping with a mere mental assent and failing to fully embrace and commit to what they profess or “say” they believe

So far in our six Step approach to defending “Faith Alone” as the means of salvation, we have in ...

Step 1: Determined the Nature and Scope of the Question

Step 2: Stated the Alleged Disagreement Clearly

Step 3: Defined the Key Terms used in our Discussion for the Sake of Mutual Understanding

Step 4: Taken a much closer look at “*Faith*” itself – its components and its various uses in Scripture – and clearly distinguished between a “*living, saving*” faith and a “*dead*” faith

Step 5: Determined exactly which arguments, issues, audiences, and “Essential” theological errors Paul and James are respectively addressing

Next, after giving “*A brief Final Word on Interpreting Scripture*”, we will proceed with our last step, Step 6, in which we will ...

Exegete line by line the passage of James’s “seeming” contradiction with Paul on the concept of “salvation by ‘faith alone’” and scripturally and logically resolve the two viewpoints – without using superficial rationalizations, Scripture twisting, or uncalled-for allegories”

A brief Word on “Biblical Hermeneutics” – The Science of Interpreting Scripture

“Hermeneutics” is the science of interpretation. “Biblical hermeneutics” is the science of interpreting the Bible.

The first generally accepted rule of Biblical hermeneutics and Scripture interpretation has always been *“Let Scripture interpret Scripture”*. This means that where there is any difficulty or uncertainty with any particular passage of Scripture, other passages of Scripture that speak much more clearly on the point at hand are to be accepted as the correct interpretation. Paul and many other inspired authors of Scripture, and even our Lord Himself, make it repeatedly and abundantly clear that salvation is by *“faith alone”* and not by *“faith + works”*. The James passage is a *“seeming”* aberration from all the others. [We note that the terms *“difficulty”* and *“uncertainty”* are entirely different from *“blatantly contradictory”*.]

A corollary rule of *“Let Scripture interpret Scripture”* would be *“Let James interpret James”*. If James should state anything that seems unclear or somewhat mixed in how it should be interpreted, then other writings of James where the issue is much more clearly addressed should be taken as the best interpretation of what is being said. In other words, just as we *“Let Scripture interpret Scripture”* we should *“Let James interpret James.”*

An additional corollary rule to *“Let Scripture interpret Scripture”* would be ...

“Let other inspired writers of Scripture help to interpret James’s use of a particular quote when they themselves use the same quote as he does.”

Again, using James as an example, if James uses a quote from, say, the Old Testament, and we want verification of exactly what he intends by its use, we can go to other inspired Biblical authors who use the same quote and see what they say about it. As we will shortly see, we have a great example of this third hermeneutical principle in Paul’s specific use of the Genesis 15:6 quote used by James, in exactly the same context as James uses it.

So, we have three rules of Biblical hermeneutics or interpretation to bear in mind ...

“Let Scripture interpret Scripture”

“Let James interpret James”.

“Let other inspired writers of Scripture help to interpret James’s use of a particular quote when they themselves use the same quote as he does.”

As we will see below, all three of our “rules” of Scripture interpretation bear out our assertion that James clearly supports *“salvation by faith alone”*.

So, let us proceed to Step 6.

Step 6: Exegete line by line the passage of James's "seeming" contradiction with Paul on the concept of "salvation by faith alone" and scripturally and logically resolve the two viewpoints without using any superficial rationalizations, Scripture twisting, or uncalled-for allegories

14 *"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?"*

Here it is simply stated that a faith without any accompanying "works" is a false, "dead" faith, and vain boasting. Let us note clearly that James does not say "*if someone has faith*". No, he instead says "*if someone says he has faith*". The word "says" is pivotal, and shows that James is clearly speaking of a false profession of faith. James is speaking in this passage to hypocrites who rest their hopes of salvation on a barren and unproductive profession of faith, when in fact all they have is a "dead" empty faith. Again, to actually possess *true saving faith* and to "*say*" you have *true saving faith* can be two entirely different things.

"Can faith save him?" The implicit answer is *No!* Because a "dead" faith cannot save anybody.

A living, saving *faith*, on the other hand, unites us to Jesus Christ, and if we are united with Christ, our entire life and perspective will have been changed and we will come to act accordingly. A *faith* that does not produce *works* and exhibits no discernable change in attitude or life shows that we have not been united to Christ, and is no more than a hypocritical "dead" faith that has not and cannot save.

James next gives us a simple analogy to prove his point.

15-16 *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*

This analogy shows the foolishness and hypocrisy of the claim that a *faith* unaccompanied by works can be a *true*, "*living*", *saving faith*. To so claim is as big a mockery of true saving faith as telling a cold and hungry brother to "*be warmed and filled*" and not doing anything to help accomplish it. It is a mockery of Christian charity and an empty and vain profession that does neither the beggar nor the professor any good

at all. (We see our Lord giving a confirming description of this when He speaks of His judgement of the nations in Matthew 25:31-46).

17 *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

Again, just as to commit such an act as described in *verses 15-16* is a mockery of true charity, so to claim to have *true saving faith* without any evidence of a changed life or good *works* to back it up is a mockery of *true saving faith* itself.

18 *But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

James again stresses the foolishness of “saying” you have a *true saving faith* when it is unaccompanied by *works*. Throughout his passage, James repeatedly shows us that a faith without works ...

... is nothing but a mere intellectual *faith* that the hypocrite shares with the devils
(verse 19)

... is “dead” (verses 17, 20, 26); and

... is useless (verses 14, 16).

Paul essentially says the same thing in I Corinthians 13.

In *verse 18* James is challenging a hypocrite to prove the genuineness of his “faith” without works, while he will let his works speak for themselves as proof of the genuineness of his faith. The hypocrite cannot do it, for “works” are the sure product and evidence that *true saving faith* is present. *True saving faith* is not an idle thing, and will be proved by *works*. James in effect says ‘*unless your faith brings forth fruit, I deny that you have true saving faith.*’

We want to note again that James does not imply that everyone performing “good works” has true saving faith, for, from the human perspective, “good works” can exist apart from saving faith – the Pharisees and the Judaizers being prime examples. Confirm the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ ...

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:21-23)

Again, not all who produce “good works” have saving faith, but all who have saving faith will produce “good works”.

James only means to show that faith, without the evidence of good works to back it up, is vainly pretended.

19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!

James states that if you confess the common knowledge that there is but one true God, “*you do well*” – but only as far as it goes. For if your *faith* is nothing more than bare intellectual acceptance of certain articles concerning God, then you have only the same *faith* as the *demons*. To merely know *about* God is vastly different thing from actually *knowing* God. For even the demons know of the one true God and the truth about Him – but it only makes them “*tremble*”. Thus, if bare intellectual assent is the extent of your *faith*, then your *faith* is no better than that of the demons ... and you shall ultimately share their destiny.

20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

We see that those who boast of *faith* without *works* are “*fools*” in the sight of God and are “*dead*” even while they live. Again, we must be very careful to look at the intent of James’ question and the audience to which it is addressed. James is not here discussing the cause of our salvation or justification, but the worth of a confession of *faith* that has no *works* to back it up. The proof of this is given in the examples that James next presents – the cases of Abraham and Rahab.

“Complimentary, Not Contradictory”: The Reconciliation of Paul and James as found in James 2:21-24

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.

24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

We would assert that these four verses, taken together, especially in the context in which they are made, give clear proof that James ...

Teaches that salvation is by *“faith alone”* ... and ...

That when James speaks of *“works”* as either *“justifying”* men or *“perfecting”* faith, he is talking only of their being the sure evidence and proof of one’s having a living saving faith, and nothing more than that.

Roman Catholics claim that three of our next four verses (21, 22, and 24) are evidence that James’s uses Abraham’s *“work”* of offering up Isaac as a sacrifice to show that salvation is by *“faith + works”*. The verses are ...

Abraham was *“justified by works”* (verse 21) ...

“by works faith was made perfect” (verse 22) ... and ...

“that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (verse 24) –

But, very interestingly and very importantly ...

... right in the middle of these three verses that they claim shows that James is supporting *“faith + works”* as the means of salvation (21, 22, and 24), James inserts verse 23 – a verse which not only makes a very clear statement that salvation is by *“faith alone”* but also utterly refutes the claims made by Roman Catholics for the other three verses.

James 2:21-24 is a clear case of using our second hermeneutical interpretative rule – that of *“letting James interpret James”*.

We want to first look at our next four verses as a whole

And, in doing so, there are two very important points that we want to keep in mind:

First, we need to remember that James and Paul are addressing different issues, different audiences, different types of faith, and different theological errors – The chief difference between them being that Paul in his passages is addressing the issue of the ground of our salvation while James in his passage is addressing the issue of the evidence of our salvation.

Second, we need to keep in mind that James begins his passage with a man who *“says”* he has a true, saving faith. As a true, saving faith will always be productive of good works, James challenges the man who *“says”* he has a living, saving faith to *“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”*.

The Apostles Peter and Paul say the same thing as James concerning “works” as evidences of one’s having a saving faith when they command all “professors” of saving faith to ‘diligently’ seek to “make your call and election sure” and to “test” and “examine” themselves to see if they have the evidences of being “in the faith”.

Again, our four verses are ...

21 *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*

22 *Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?*

23 *“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*

24 *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*

So, first, taken as a whole, what is James really saying in these four verses?

We have said that according to our second principle of Biblical interpretation ...

No clearer proof of a man’s intentions in what he has written in one place can be given than what he has clearly written on the same subject elsewhere.

Stated more succinctly – “*Let James interpret James*”

Verses 21-24 are a perfect hermeneutical example of “*Letting James interpret James*” as the claims made by Roman Catholics for “*faith + works*” righteousness being taught in verses 21, 22, and 24 are utterly refuted by James’s inclusion of verse 23 right in the middle of them – for verse 23 very clearly and precisely shows that Abraham’s justification (salvation) came entirely by “*faith alone*” without any works.

Verse 23 reads ...

“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Again, the verse clearly shows that it was Abraham’s “*belief*” (*his faith*), and that alone, that attained his “*righteousness*” (his justification, salvation) and not any “*work*”.

James 2:23 contains a quote of Genesis 15:6

... which, in its context, reads ...

“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abraham in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.

But Abram said, ‘LORD GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ Then Abram said, ‘Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!’

And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”
(Genesis 15:1-6)

We see, in the Genesis passage above that God had just made promises concerning the future to Abraham, whereupon we are told that Abraham “*believed in the LORD*” (i.e., he expressed *faith* in God and His word) and that God’s immediate response to Abraham’s profession of faith in Him was “*and He accounted it to him for righteousness*” (i.e., Abraham was justified or saved *by his faith alone*).

This is an ESPECIALLY significant point when we consider that Abraham was ‘accounted righteous’ (i.e., justified, saved) ...

LONG BEFORE his circumcision,

LONG BEFORE the birth of Isaac, and

EVEN LONGER BEFORE the “*work*” mentioned in James 2:21, (“*he offered Isaac his son on the altar*”) – the “*work*” which Roman Catholics claim helped Abraham attain his salvation

In writing this verse and inserting the Genesis quote where he did, James very unmistakably and very clearly tells us that his use of the terms – “*justified by works*” (verse 21) ... “*by works faith was made perfect*” (verse 22) ... and “*that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*” (verse 24) ... has nothing at all to do with “*works*” being a cause or joint cause of Abraham’s salvation – which, again, according to verse 23, was gained by “*faith alone*”.

Read it again ...

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”
(Genesis 15:6)

We would also note here that Hebrews 11:8-13 shows the fulfillment of God's promises made to Abraham in Genesis 15:1-6 and also states that the "works" done by Abraham were produced "by faith", and not the other way around.

Again we say "Let James interpret James". James is his own best interpreter.

We also said that a corollary rule to "Letting James interpret James" would be to ...

"Let other inspired writers of Scripture help to interpret James's use of a quote when they themselves use and write on the same quote as he does."

Just as an inspired Scripture cannot contradict itself, so inspired Biblical writers of Scripture cannot contradict each other. So when one Biblical writer writes very clearly on a verse quoted by another Biblical writer, the clearer interpretation must be used to help understand the other writer's meaning in using that verse.

Paul, for example, in Romans 4:2-5 quotes the same Genesis 15:6 passage that James does in James 2:23 and uses it to show that "righteousness" is accounted to "him who does not work but believes" (i.e., righteousness comes by "faith alone") ...

"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does 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 ..."

Here, in Romans 4, Paul uses the same Genesis 15:6 quote that James does in James 2:23 to make it extremely clear that "works" were in no way responsible for the justification or salvation of Abraham.

[We note that Paul also quotes Genesis 15:6 two more times in Chapter 4 of Romans. You should read the rest of Romans 4 (verses 9 – 25), because in them Paul further expands upon the meaning of Genesis 15:6 and how it is to be interpreted.]

Likewise, the author of Hebrews, in Hebrews 11:17, 31, specifically referring to the act of Abraham 'offering up Isaac' (our James 2:21 verse), makes it very clear that both the "work" of Abraham, when he "offered up Isaac" and the "work" of Rahab, "when she received the spies with peace", were both produced "by faith" ...

"By faith Abraham when he was tested, offered up Isaac ... By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Hebrews 11: 17, 31)

Again, Abraham “*offered up Isaac*” in an act motivated “*by faith*” ... and this coming decades after he was “*declared righteous*” by God for “*the faith*” by which he later “*offered up Isaac*”.

So, very clearly, like Moses (in Genesis 15), Paul, and the author of Hebrews, James uses the same incident in James 2:21, that of Abraham offering his son Isaac on the altar, to show that *works* flow from *faith* and are produced “*by faith*” – and not the other way around.

That it was Abraham’s “*faith alone*”, his belief and trust in God, that “*justified*” (“*saved*”) Abraham, and not any “*work*”, is a point on which Moses, Paul, James and the author of Hebrews are all in full agreement.

Looking at the verses individually ...

22 “*Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?*”

Abraham’s *faith* was “*made perfect*” by his *works* in the sense that his *works* showed that his *faith* was not the “*dead*” idle *faith* of demons, but a *true saving faith* that attained its objective, Abraham’s salvation.

That Abraham’s *faith* itself was not “*perfected*” by any “*work*” in the sense of helping him to attain salvation is clearly shown in the very next verse, verse 23, which says ...

“*And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’”*

Thus, we see that Abraham’s *faith* itself was already fully formed and “*perfect*” (in the sense that Abraham attained salvation by his *faith*) LONG BEFORE he offered Isaac up as a sacrifice. James only means to show that the integrity or truth of Abraham’s *faith* was proven or “*perfected*” (but not caused) before men, and to himself, by his outward obedience, conduct, and *works*.

21 “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*” (James 2:21)

24 “*You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*”

Here we would point out again that James is addressing a man who “says” he has saving faith and challenges him to “*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*”. James in these two verses is talking about the evidence of a man’s justification or salvation and not the ground or root cause of it. That Abraham had a living, saving faith was “*justified*”, or proven, by his works.

23 *“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’”*

James 2:23 has been so thoroughly discussed above that it needs no further mention.

Having looked at the very important and pivotal verses of James 2:21-24 as a whole and individually, let us now return to our verse by verse exposition of the remaining verses in James’s passage, verses 25 and 26.

25 *Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*

We have already seen in our earlier look at Hebrews 11 that Rahab’s “work”, like that of Abraham, flowed from and was produced “by faith”.

We would especially note what interesting choices James makes to prove his point – the choices of Abraham, the great Patriarch of the Jews, and Rahab, a Gentile harlot. But what a wide-ranging contrast James uses to show us that no one ever has been, or ever will be, counted as righteous without the evidence of the *good works* that are the proof of the presence of a *true living, saving faith*. Whoever then “says he has faith”, from the most eminent to the most debased, should exhibit proof of it by their *good works*.

26 *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

What a fitting conclusion to the Apostle’s discourse. As “*the body without the spirit*” is nothing but a “*dead*” lifeless corpse, “*so faith without works is dead also.*”

Even the best of human *works* without the background of *true saving faith* are worthless and meaningless. Indeed, God Himself says through the Prophet Isaiah ...

*“But we are all like an unclean thing,
And our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.” (Isaiah 64:6)*

Men and God view things differently. What may appear to be *good* to man is not really *good* to God unless it is done in *faith* ...

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6)

Possession of a *true saving faith* is absolutely necessary for any *work* we may do to be “*good*” in God’s view. Any *work* we do must be done in *faith*, i.e., with God’s glory in

mind and in obedience to Him, for it to be a truly *good work*. Good works flow from and out of a living saving faith and not the other way around.

Thus, even the greatest and most plausible profession of *faith* without accompanying *works* is “*dead*”. This has been James’ point all along. We remember our example of a fruit tree. The tree and its fruit are a unit. *Faith* is the root of the tree, and *good works* are the fruit. No matter how good and healthy a fruit tree may look, if it produces no fruit it is barren and worthless, and will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Again, we, just like Abraham, must have a living, saving “*faith*” in order to be saved or justified ...

“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’” (James 2:23, Genesis 15:6)

And, again, “*Good works*” are the sure fruit of our salvation and it is “*by faith*” that we produce them. They are one of the important evidences by which we are to “*test*” and “*examine*” ourselves to make sure that “*we are in the faith*”.

Indeed, the Apostle John tells us in Revelation that at the last judgment “*works*” will be looked at as the proof of our true saving faith ...

“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” (Revelation 20:12)

Just as it is with the tree and its fruit, so it is with a profession of *faith* in Christ. Our Lord Himself said ...

“You will know them by their fruits ... Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 3:16-20)

The Conclusion of the Matter

We stated early on in our paper that from the viewpoints of both logic and an infallible Scripture there is no room for compromise on the Question ...

“Is salvation ‘by Faith Alone’ or ‘by Faith + Works’?”

It must be one way or the other. Either Protestants are right and we are saved and justified by ‘*Faith Alone*’, or, Roman Catholics are right and we are saved or justified by ‘*Faith + Works*’. These claims are mutually exclusive, and to accept one, you must reject

the other. Protestants and Roman Catholics cannot both be right on this issue. One side has to be misreading or misinterpreting their Bible. The all-important question at hand is “Which?”

We think that we have successfully shown that salvation is by “*faith alone*” and that the James 2:14-26 passage is “*Complimentary, Not Contradictory*” with Paul’s passages.

Among other things ...

We have shown and explained that the major “key” to understanding the seeming contradiction between Paul and James is to realize that Paul and James are addressing different issues, different audiences, different types of faith, and different theological errors.

We have carefully exegeted James 2:14-26, the passage that Roman Catholics most frequently use to boost their claim that salvation is by “*Faith + Works*”, and have endeavored to do so without using any superficial rationalizations, Scripture twisting, or uncalled-for allegories.

And we have stressed and followed the three main rules of Biblical interpretation

“Let Scripture interpret Scripture”

“Let James interpret James”

“Let other inspired writers of Scripture help to interpret James’s use of a quote when they themselves use the same quote as he does.”

... to prove beyond reasonable doubt that salvation is by “*faith alone*”, and that James fully agrees with it.

We would give a final sum-up of Protestant belief on the issue that salvation is by “*faith alone*” by again quoting Ephesians 2:8-9 ...

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

In these two verses, it is very clearly and very specifically stated that ...

We are “saved ... by grace”. “Grace”, you will remember, denotes a free, undeserved, unmerited, and unearned gift. Thus, to be saved “*by grace*” means that we are saved purely from and by the mercy of God and nothing else – no work(s) on our part, nothing.

We are saved “*through faith*”. Faith is the alone instrument by which we lay hold of Christ and receive salvation. Just as “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*”, and this decades before the “*work*” by which Roman Catholics would have us believe helped him attain his salvation, so we too are “*saved through faith*”.

The “*faith*” through which we are “*saved*” is a “*gift*” from God to us – “*it is the gift of God*” – and not a reward conferred or debt paid for any action or merit on our part

And, lastly, as if to remove any lingering doubt as to whether our own “*works*” had any part at all in our salvation, we are told that this “*gift*” of “*faith*”, through which we are “*saved*”, was “*not of works*” – i.e., our salvation had nothing to do in any way, shape or form with any ‘*work*’ performed on our part – and that we are specifically told that it is “*not of works*” to prevent anyone from ever boasting that it was, i.e., “*lest anyone should boast*”.

Very simply and very straightforwardly – the Apostle Paul tells us that the “*gift*” of “*faith*” through which we are saved is “*not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” Note very closely and specifically that according to Paul:

Your “*faith*” and consequent salvation is “*not of yourselves*” and “*not of works*”.

Your faith did not well up from within you and you performed no “*work*” for which God was obligated to save you or for which He conferred a reward upon you. No, your salvation was instead a “*gift*” of God’s “*grace*”.

Paul very specifically stated that your salvation was “*not of works*” precisely in order to keep you from “*boasting*” that you had any part in it – i.e., your salvation was “*not of works, lest anyone should boast*”.

How, in the light of these two verses alone, anyone could maintain that salvation is by “*faith + works*” is beyond reason.

Again, all of the evidence presented cries out that Protestants are right in their claim that salvation is by *faith alone*. We have shown this through Scripture proofs, through careful exegesis, through following accepted Biblical interpretive principles and through reasoning and logic.

God, through the regeneration of your heart and giving you the “*gifts*” of repentance and faith, has done everything necessary for accomplishing your salvation. In truth, as has been said, the only thing that you contributed to your salvation was the sin that made it necessary.

Therefore, do not rob God of His sovereign glory in your salvation by taking part of it from Him and attributing it to yourself and your “works”. Salvation is “*by faith alone*”.

Rather, say with the Psalmists ...

*“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory.” (Psalm 115:1)*

*“Give to the LORD the glory due to His name;
Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” (Psalm 29:2)*

Henceforth, let all your thoughts concerning your salvation be ...

“Soli Deo Gloria” ... “Glory to God alone”
