

PROFITABLY UNDERSTANDING TRAGICALLY MISUNDERSTOOD BIBLE PASSAGES
Part VI: Understanding The James 2:24 Claim That "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"
(James 2:14-26)

I. Introduction

- A. A greatly misunderstood verse is James 2:24 that claims: "Ye see how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." The Catholic Encyclopedia (R. C. Broderick, ed., 1987, s. v. "Justification") uses this verse to promote belief that salvation is by faith **plus** keeping the sacraments of the Catholic Church; it asserts: "We are justified by Christ (cf. Is. 53:11) **and by good works, as declared in the Epistle of James (2:24-26).**" [emphases ours] Others in Protestant circles or the cults teach one must believe and be baptized in water or speak in tongues or endure to the end to gain eternal life.
- B. However, Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9 KJV that "... by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of works** lest any man should boast." [emphases ours]
- C. We thus study James 2:24 in its context of James 2:14-26 for an edifying understanding of the passage:

II. Understanding The James 2:24 Claim That "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

- A. James 2:24 is part of a discussion in James 2:14-26 on "faith and works," cf. Ryrie Study Bible, KJV.
- B. As we view the **start** of that discussion, we note James 2:14 reads, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?", and discern James was **NOT** claiming one is **not** saved by **faith**, but that a **true faith** will **yield works**, Bib. Know. Com., N. T., p. 825.
- C. Evidence that James here contrasted a true versus a false faith can be seen in the Greek N. T. text itself:
 - 1. The first time the word for "faith" appears in James 1:14a, it exists **without** the definite article, **hay**, though its second appearance in 1:14b is preceded by that article, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1963, p. 783.
 - 2. Thus, James **literally** wrote: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can **the** faith save him?" We might paraphrase that last sentence as: "Can **THE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED faith** save him?" (cf. James 2:14 NIV that renders the sentence as, "Can **such** faith save him?" or the ESV that translates it, "Can **that** faith save him?" [emphases ours])
 - 3. Hence, James there critiqued a **FALSE KIND of alleged "faith"** that is upheld by one who boasts of having "faith" when he shows **no evidence** that his "faith" even **exists** due to his **lack of works!**
- D. Then, we note that the words in James 2:18-19 are **all** spoken by an **opponent** of James who **agreed** that "faith without works is dead", but who belittled faith and elevated works, Bib. Kno. Com., N. T., p. 825f.
- E. Accordingly, at James 2:20-26, James **countered** his opponent's view that one can have faith **without** any **demonstration** that such a faith is **REAL** as is **EVIDENCED** by **good works** (as follows): Ibid., p. 826.
 - 1. James countered his opponent's idea that faith is not very important by alluding to Old Testament Abraham and Rahab who had true faith **as was evidenced by their works**, cf. James 2:20-26.
 - 2. In making **this point**, James 2:24 was penned to show that a **TRUE** faith, being **EVIDENCED** by **TRUE WORKS**, makes **WORKS** a **NECESSARY ASSOCIATE** of **REAL JUSTIFICATION**; thus, one can say that "by works a man is justified and not by faith only" in that **GODLY WORKS** indicate a **TRUE** faith's **EXISTENCE**, and that a **TRUE** justification has occurred!
 - 3. Since we have noted that James is writing in this section to **COUNTER** an **opponent** who wrongly **minimized faith** while **exalting works**, James 2:24 **cannot** be forced to mean that works **contribute** to making one **become justified** [as Catholicism and some Protestants and the cults claim]! Rather, James 2:24 must reveal a man is justified by works and **not** by faith **ALONE ONLY** in the sense that the presence of **real works** mean a **real justification** exists since a **real faith** was **behind the works!**

Lesson: James and Paul actually complemented each other: Paul held man is saved by faith ALONE, not by works, and James taught a TRUE faith will PRODUCE good works! As Ryrie put it, "Faith and works are like a two-coupon ticket to heaven. The coupon of works is not good for passage, and the coupon of faith is not valid if detached from works." (Ryrie St. Bible, KJV, 1978 ed., fn. to James 2:24)

Application: (1) We must hold that one is justified by God through faith ALONE. (2) Yet, we must ALSO hold that a TRUE belief will produce a CHANGED LIFE, or one has NEVER REALLY BELIEVED! Note how Paul in Ephesians 2:10 revealed that AFTER faith, we are to do good works!