

New Testament Foundations: Appendix A

Justification by Faith or Works

One issue that has dogged the epistle of James throughout history is the question concerning its teaching on justification by faith. Liberal scholars see a radical division between James and Paul over the doctrine of justification. Paul, they say, taught a justification by faith, and James a justification by works. The following are two verses that summarize the controversy.

Paul: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." (Romans 3:28)

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

But Paul and James do not contradict one another—they compliment one another.

1. Paul denounced works that are done as the *means* of salvation.

"...because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20)

2. James denounced faith that is mere mental assent.

"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." (James 2:19)

3. Paul advocated the kind of works that James advocated.

Romans 2:13: ...for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

4. James advocated the kind of faith that Paul advocated.

"But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (James 1:6-8)

Paul and James together present the full dimension of salvation.