

Faith, Works, Paul, James, and Justification

<https://youtu.be/YLsPVh2ENPg>

The Bible Says (Introduction):

In a short video John Ankerberg (<https://youtu.be/A9QbwGGmjJw>) compares justification by faith alone with justification by faith plus works. He looks at Protestant and Catholic viewpoints and quotes scriptures from the apostles Paul and James. Given that justification is so important for us to understand, I thought it would be well worthwhile to make some observations on Mr Ankerberg's video. I hope you find this insightful and helpful.

John Ankerberg:

Now under number five, representing the views of Protestants, are the famous words "by faith alone." For Protestants, faith is not just intellectual assent to certain facts about Christ's salvation; rather, faith is a knowledge of the facts plus a total trust or resting of one's eternal destiny in Jesus Christ, who is the sole reason and grounds upon which God justifies us.

For Protestants, justification is an act that can take place in a single moment, the moment the sinner, through faith, trusts Christ completely. At that moment, the benefits of Christ are applied to the sinner's life, and he is officially judged and declared by God to stand in His sight as righteous.

The Bible Says:

Yes, righteousness is imputed to us if we are in justification.

So, what does it mean to be in justification? It means we are in right standing with God, not under condemnation. Here's the apostle Paul's description of those who are in justification:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1)

So . . . we must be "in" or abiding in Christ, and, we must be "walking" after - or following - the holy spirit.

In order to *follow* the holy spirit we first must *have* the holy spirit. We can't follow it if we don't even have it. And to abide in Jesus we must somehow enter His presence and know Him. While we remain in His presence, receiving and following the holy spirit, we are in justification.

Question: can we receive the holy spirit and know Jesus by faith alone, by just trusting Him?

No. That is not how it works. Scripture clearly tells us the holy spirit is given to those who obey God . . . not just "trust."

"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." (Peter, in Acts 5:32)

So, how do we obey God? What does God tell us to do?

Here is the apostle Paul:

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30)

Those who obey and come to God in repentance will receive the gift of the holy spirit:

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38)

Apparently, then, we do not enter justification - nor do we remain in justification - just because we trust Jesus or have "faith alone."

To be in justification we must be abiding in Jesus, and we must have - and follow - the holy spirit (re: Romans 8:1).

We will receive the holy spirit if we will obey God's command to come to repentance (re: Acts 17:30; 5:32; 2:38).

While we abide in Jesus and follow the holy spirit we are in justification, not under condemnation, and Jesus' righteousness is imputed to us.

John Ankerberg:

For Protestants, the person's faith is not a meritorious work that contributes or helps provide justification. Rather, faith is only an instrument which allows a sinful person to reach out to Christ, and He is the sole reason, grounds and basis on which God justifies.

The Bible Says:

So, then, faith alone is not enough: we must "reach out."

Through faith we see that Christ and saving grace are available. Through faith we see we have a choice to make: to "reach out" to Christ, or, to do nothing.

It is up to us to decide to "reach out." Just having faith that Jesus is a choice - "faith alone" - is not enough.

John Ankerberg:

Let me try to illustrate that. Picture a burning building, and a person trapped on the third floor. When that person is urged to jump – to have faith that the firemen below will catch him in their net – if he jumps it will not be the person's faith which saves him. Rather, it will be the net and the firemen holding the net who catch him.

The Bible Says:

Yes, of course it is the net – not the faith – that saves. Short of landing in the net, no one would be saved. By analogy, to be "saved" would be to receive the gift of eternal life, at

Jesus' return. Simply put: short of receiving eternal life, every one of us will perish.

Note that Mr. Ankerberg has introduced "saved" into the conversation about justification, but don't be misled to think justification is the same as salvation. Notice how Paul separates justification - in the present - from salvation—in the future:

"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Romans 5:9)

"Through him" can only happen if we continue to abide in Him. As we saw in Romans 8:1, we must abide in Him to remain in justification—not under condemnation.

Justification is a believer's present good standing with God, and is more than a one-time act as suggested earlier by Mr Ankerberg.

Shortly we'll see that it is possible to fall away from justification by not abiding in Jesus, and not following the holy spirit (re: Romans 8:1).

It is possible to return to condemnation, and we have many warnings not to let that happen.

Without faith, of course, we would not choose to jump from the window. But all the faith in the world would not help us if we choose to remain in the window. Faith alone - just trusting and staying in the window -will not work for us.

Here are some scriptures. Salvation is by grace, through faith, as shown in Ephesians 2:8:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8)

We come to saving grace – the net – *through* faith, not just because we *have* faith.

Through faith we see we have a choice to make: to jump from the window, to "come to God" on His terms . . . or to remain in the window, staying on our own terms. Without faith we could not see or accept that the net is there for us, and we would never jump or "come to God" on His terms:

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."
(Hebrews 11:6)

It is the jump - the decision to "come to God" on His terms - that pleases God and puts us into justification, on the way to the net. While in justification we have "the hope of salvation" and are "appointed . . . to obtain salvation":

"But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5:8,9)

John Ankerberg:

In salvation, it's not your faith which saves you; rather, it is Christ who saves you. Our faith merely decides to allow Christ to rescue us, and it commits us into Christ's hands.

The Bible Says:

Salvation is by grace, received "*through*" faith (Ephesians 2:8), not just because we *have* faith.

". . . our faith merely allows Christ to decide to rescue us"???

That's what "faith alone" preachers will tell you.

Jesus, however, is:

"the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9)

God is pleased (Hebrews 11:6) by those who "through" faith, (Ephesians 2:8) decide to obey (Acts 5:32; 17:30) and come to Him (Hebrews 11:6) on His terms (Acts 17:30; 2:38; 2:38).

". . . and it commits us into Christ's hands" . . . suggests that once in His hands, no harm can come to us: salvation is guaranteed.

That's a very misleading suggestion, because we can fall away from justification: we can leave His hands by no longer abiding in Him as required for remaining in justification (Romans 8:1).

What happens then?

"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." (Jesus, in John 15:6)

John Ankerberg:

To clearly see that faith in no way provides the basis of our salvation, answer this: how much do you think your faith would save you if after you jumped off the third floor, on the way down, you discover the firemen were only standing in a circle and they weren't holding any net?

The Bible Says:

Jumped, and found no net? In that case your faith would have been in a God who doesn't save.

Faith does not save, but faith is necessary because without trusting that God exists and rewards we could not - and would never - decide to "come to God" as we saw in Hebrews 11:6.

John Ankerberg:

Well at that point it would be very clear that your faith can't do anything to save you. What you need is a real net, with real firemen holding it.

The same is true spiritually: it's not your faith that actually provides your salvation. Rather it is Christ who paid for all your sins on the cross, and He has the strength to do all the

saving.

The Bible Says:

Please don't be misled by his statement that all our sins were paid for on the cross: our sins were not "all paid for" on the cross.

Perhaps that seems like an outrageous statement, so let me take a minute to explain. The "wages" or penalty for sin is to perish in death:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23)

We are all sinners, doomed to perish in death. Jesus, however, has made His death and blood available to cover our death penalty. Thank You, Jesus.

We can have that coverage, that mercy, that redemption - as promised - if we will obey: if we will come to God in repentance, confessing and forsaking sin.

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Paul, in Acts 17:30)

Mercy is *promised* if we will obey:

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13)

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him . . ." (Isaiah 55:7)

Our sins remain, not forgiven, not blotted out and not paid for unless we come to God in repentance:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19, NKJV)

If we will obey and come to God in repentance we will have "remission of sins that are past" (Romans 3:25). We will be "purged" of our "old sins" (2 Peter 1:9).

With the sins that separated us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2) erased, we can enter justification with God. We enter "the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19) by the gift of the holy spirit — given "to them that obey Him" and "repent" (Acts 5:32 and 2:38).

While we remain in justification, abiding in Him in repentance and walking "in the light" (led by the holy spirit) Jesus continues to cover our sins with His blood:

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

"Christ died for our sins" as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:3. He made His death and blood available to cover the death penalty we earn for sin. That coverage, that redemption, is available by grace to all who come to repentance. While we abide in Him in repentance, following the holy spirit, He continues to cover any new sins with His blood. He gave His

life for us so that He would be able - with His death and blood - to redeem us:

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14)

While in justification with God we have "the hope of salvation" as we saw earlier in 1 Thessalonians 5:8,9.

The apostle Peter made a similar comment while speaking to a gathering of church elders regarding salvation for both Israelites and Gentiles. He did not say anyone had been saved: he told them "we believe . . . we shall be saved, even as they" ("they" referring to Gentile believers):

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:11)

That salvation will be the gift of eternal life, to be received by grace - as promised - at Jesus' "revelation": at His return. Then we will have eternal security —saved from ever perishing in death.

"And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2:25)

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13)

Outside of repentance we receive none of the promised mercy. We will perish, paying our own death penalty. Jesus warned:

"except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5)

Peter makes it clear: come to repentance, or else perish:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9)

Now it is clear why Jesus instructed His disciples to preach "repentance and remission of sins," not "faith alone":

"Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:45-47)

John Ankerberg:

Faith is nothing more than your decision, your exercising your free will, to ask Christ to save you.

The Bible Says:

As if "asking Christ to save you" is all that is required.

Jesus is . . .

"the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9)

"Faith alone" means just that: nothing other than faith is required. No obedience required. No repentance required. "Faith alone" is nonsense.

John Ankerberg:

Why should anyone think that your decision to ask Christ to save you – your placing your faith in Him – actually helps Him to save you?

The Bible Says:

Jesus does not need our help to save us, but to receive His promises, we must follow His instructions.

John Ankerberg:

Now, five across from faith alone is Catholicism's belief that justification is by faith plus works. For Catholicism, faith is required, but they object to saying that faith alone is all that God requires for Him to justify a person. In addition to faith, Catholicism also requires works.

Fr Mitchell Pacwa, S.J.:

But at the same time, as Saint James says, faith alone is not enough. Faith without good works is insufficient, because the justification that the Catholic church talks about is not – as Luther taught – merely imputed . . .

The Bible Says:

The priest is partly right, and partly wrong. Yes, James wrote that Abraham was justified by works, "and not by faith only":

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (James 2:24)

But Abraham's works were not good works or good deeds, as the priest claimed. Abraham's "works" was his obedience to God. By or through faith Abraham saw he had a choice to make, and he chose to obey. He left for the promised land - as instructed - and later offered his son Isaac.

Here's an example:

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." (Hebrews 11:8)

Abraham's works was his obedience to God . . . not good works or deeds done for someone else . . . and not the "deeds" or works of the law that Paul wrote about. "Works" refers to

different things in different contexts; ignore the context and you will draw wrong conclusions!

John Ankerberg:

Now, the dispute centers on some key passages in the New Testament: most notably the third and fourth chapters of Romans and the second chapter of the epistle of James. Let's look at these passages right now. Romans chapter three beginning in verse twenty-eight says

"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."

Protestants believe that since Paul says that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law, then one can only conclude justification must be by faith alone. There are no other options.

The Bible Says:

There are no other options??? Why ignore Abraham's works, his obedience, for which he was justified to God?

Yes, we can rule out the works or deeds of the law. And we can rule out good deeds or works done for others, done as a result of being "His workmanship":

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10)

Yes, there is another option.

Abraham was justified - and deemed a believer - because of his works - his obedience - "and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

John Ankerberg:

Further, Paul's own conclusion in chapter five is:

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand . . ." (Romans 5:1,2)

The Bible Says:

"**By**" or "**through**" faith . . . not just because we *have* faith. By or through faith Abraham saw he had a choice to make, and he chose to obey. His works was his obedience. For his obedience he was justified to God, "and not by faith only."

Salvation is by grace . . . received **through** faith, not just because we *have* faith:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Paul, in Ephesians 2:8)

Through faith we see we have a choice, and a decision to make: to come to God on his

terms, or else to avoid God. Without faith that God exists - and rewards - we would not see that choice and we could not decide to come to Him:

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."
(Hebrews 11:6)

Coming to God on His terms pleases Him! Not "faith alone"!

John Ankerberg:

In Romans chapter four the apostle Paul builds his case for justification by faith without works . . .

The Bible Says:

Whoa . . . hold on just a minute! Paul's case in Romans 3 and 4 is that we are not justified by the deeds or works of the law.

Mr. Ankerberg just expanded the works or deeds of the law in Romans 3 and 4 to include any and all works, including works like Abraham's: his obedience!

I'll replay that in case you missed it.

John Ankerberg:

In Romans chapter four the apostle Paul builds his case for justification by faith without works by giving a historical example, when he appeals to the case of Abraham. He begins

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

For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:2,3)

Here again, you'll find the word "reckoned" means to count, to impute, to place to the account of Abraham.

The Bible Says:

The "works" Paul referred to in Romans 4:1–3 was the "works" or "deeds of the law." That was the context Paul established a few verses earlier in Romans 3:20 and 3:28:

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20)

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (Romans 3:28)

Paul was not referring to any other works in Romans 4:1–3.

Yes, Abraham *believed* God.

True *believers* are those who - like Abraham - act on their faith and obey God. Abraham's "works" was his obedience.

Here's James describing Abraham:

"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (James 2:20–24)

Abraham was deemed a believer "not by faith only"; he acted on his faith: he obeyed.

That was his "works." True believing goes beyond "faith alone."

John Ankerberg:

After stating this about Abraham, Paul argues:

"To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly . . ."

Notice once again, that according to Paul, God justifies the ungodly, not the ones righteous within. Paul says:

". . . his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:5)

The Bible Says:

Again, "to him that worketh not" in Romans 4:5 refers to the works or "deeds of the law." That's the context Paul set a few verses earlier in Romans 3:20 and 28:

Abraham's example shows us that believing goes beyond "faith only."

Because he acted on his faith and obeyed, he was deemed a believer.

"Faith alone," however, says works of any kind - including obedience - are not required . . . as if God justifies those who choose to remain in disobedience! "Faith alone" defies common sense!

John Ankerberg:

Now what Paul very clearly says here is that when Abraham believed God, that was the time of his justification.

The Bible Says:

Exactly the point made in James 2:20-24. *Believing*, however, is not the same as "faith only." True believing goes beyond "faith only." Abraham was not justified by faith alone: he acted on his faith - he chose to obey - and for *that* he was deemed to be a believer and was justified to God.

"Faith" in the Greek (πίστις "pistis") is trust, a noun; it is something you have . . . intellectual assent.

"Believe" in the Greek (πιστεύω "pisteuō") is a verb; committing to your faith by acting on it.

John Ankerberg:

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham believed God, and he was justified by divine declaration apart from works.

The Bible Says:

Whoa! Stop! "Apart from works"??? NO!

Are we tearing James out of the Bible???

"Ye see than how that works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24)

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26)

Abraham's "works" was his obedience, not Paul's works of the law!

John Ankerberg:

So here in chapter four the apostle Paul links the statement from chapter three – we are justified by faith apart from the works of the law – with the historical situation of Abraham to prove his case: that a man is declared justified by God the moment he believes.

The Bible Says:

When he believes: when he acts on his faith and obeys, like Abraham . . . "and not by faith only."

True believing goes beyond "faith only."

Let's look at a verse from Peter. Here we see that non-believers are described as the "disobedient":

"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner" (1 Peter 2:7)

John Ankerberg:

Paul labors the point that it is by faith alone in Christ – and nothing of man's works – that is the basis of God's justifying a man.

The Bible Says:

Stop! Paul never says "by faith alone." Nowhere in Paul's writings does he say "by faith alone."

Paul says not by the works or deeds of the law.

Paul says *through* (Eph 2:8), or *by* - by means of - faith we receive saving grace . . . not just because we *have* faith.

It is the decision - to "come to God" on His terms, that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). Without faith we could not see or realize we have a real choice to make, and we would never decide to come to God.

John Ankerberg:

How does the Roman Catholic Church deal with this? Well they counter this concept of justification by faith alone by an appeal to James chapter 2 verse 24, where it reads:

"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone"

Now, Roman Catholic scholars say to Protestants "Can the Bible make it any clearer? Here you are, going around, teaching that justification is by faith alone, and yet we have a statement right from the apostle James that says:"

"You see then, that justification is by works, and not by faith alone"

And what's more, not only does James say that justification is by works, and not by faith alone, but he appeals to Abraham to prove his point – the very historical figure that the apostle Paul appealed to in stating his case for justification by faith in Romans four.

The Bible Says:

This is easy to resolve: Paul is talking about "the deeds [works] of the law" in Romans 3 and 4.

Abraham's works was neither "the works of the law" nor was it "good works" or deeds done for others.

Abraham's works was his obedience. He, through faith, saw that he had a choice and he decided to obey. For that he was deemed to be a believer and was justified to God, "and not by faith only."

True believing goes beyond "faith only." True believers are those who act on their faith, obeying by coming to God on His terms.

Paul left us a convenient one-verse step-by-step illustration of how we enter justification, receiving the gift of the holy spirit:

"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13)

First, we hear the gospel: the good news of salvation. If we trust or have faith in the gospel, we see that we have a choice to make: to either come to God (Hebrews 11:6) or to ignore God. If we then also believe: if we act on that faith, obey and come to God in repentance (Acts 17:30) we will enter his promised mercy (Proverbs 28:13). Our past sins and the death penalty earned for them will be blotted out (Acts 3:19) and we'll receive the promised gift of the holy spirit (Acts 5:32; 2:38).

Having the holy spirit is essential, but having it is not a guarantee of future salvation, as some claim. As we saw in Romans 8:1 we must *follow* the holy spirit to remain in justification. We must - in repentance - be *led* by the holy spirit as Paul wrote a few verses later:

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Romans 8:13,14)

The apostle Paul had the holy spirit, but he did not claim that he was therefore guaranteed salvation. He understood it was possible for him to revert to a life of sin and therefore be rejected - a "castaway" - even after preaching to others:

"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection:lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Corinthians 9:27)

points to take home:

"Works" refers to different things in different contexts; confusion will result if we ignore the context.

"By faith" is often misunderstood to mean if you just have faith, rather than through or by means of faith.

"Believe" and "faith" are often assumed to be same, but believers - like Abraham - act on their faith and obey God.