



A Post Tenebras Lux Study on Ephesians...

Are Paul and James at Odds? Ephesians 2:8-10

Now, before we move on to this week's lesson there are a few questions that I want to clear up. Last week, I was asked how I would resolve the apparent conflict between Paul and James. I was asked that question because there does seem to be a conflict between how the two apostles viewed the importance of works. I'm sure most of you remember the passage taken from Ephesians 2, but in case you don't let's look at it again.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:8**...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Certainly, Paul seems clear enough. The point he is making is that no one deserves credit on the basis on anything they might have done to earn their salvation. You will remember that I emphasized that "**grace**" here really means something akin to "**kindness**". We are saved not because we deserved it or because of any meritorious behavior on our part but rather because God demonstrated His kindness toward us and regenerated us when we were dead in our trespasses and sin.

But James focuses on something quite different.

^{NIV} **James 2:14**...What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "**Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,**" but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "**You have faith; I have deeds.**" Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder. ²⁰ You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "**Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,**" and he was called God's friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

So there appears to be a dilemma. Paul seems to be saying we are **justified by faith alone or faith apart from works** while James seems to be saying that **faith alone apart from works never saved anybody**. The two positions are, at first glance, about as far apart as any two positions could ever be.

In modern times, a form of this argument, has surfaced its head in terms of something called the **Lordship Salvation** debate. The debate, and I am surely over-simplifying it, centers around the conflict that occurs between among other things two opposing camps. Those that hold that salvation is based solely upon making a profession of faith hold what is called a **Non-Lordship** view. While those that hold that genuine salvation will work itself out in righteous behavior hold what they call the **Lordship** view. The concern of the **Non-Lordship** group is that salvation be maintained as being completely of grace; they are concerned that our works not have any determination in the reality of our salvation. The concern of the **Lordship** group is that sinners not be given false hope for having made a false profession; they are concerned with something called

antinomianism (that is, they are concerned that people strive in their sanctification and not live anyway they want).

Obviously, there have been many books written on this particular issue. I would recommend just two: **Christ the Lord** edited by Michael Horton and **Faith Alone** by R.C. Sproul.

Now as I said earlier, the real debate centers in the apparent contradiction between Paul and James. One scholar has gone so far as to say that there are really four different possibilities in view:

- (1) James was criticizing Paul's teaching concerning justification. (Paul wrote his letter first).
- (2) James was criticizing not Paul but those who had an antinomian misconception of Paul's teaching.
- (3) Paul and James have different problems in view and are not struggling against each other at all.
- (4) Paul was criticizing James' teaching concerning justification. (James wrote his letter first.)

Most commentators favor either view 2 or 3. It seems pretty clear that James had no patience whatsoever with antinomianism. But the real problem comes from the fact that both Paul and James use the example of Abraham to prove their arguments. The problem is that that they use Abraham from two completely different chapters. Paul uses Abraham as he is found in Genesis 15 and James uses Abraham as he is found in Genesis 22. This is a very important point in determining what they were driving toward.

Let's look at Paul first.

^{NIV} **Romans 4:9**...Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. ¹² And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. ¹³ It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "**I have made you a father of many nations.**" He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-- the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. ¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "**So shall your offspring be.**" ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-- since he was about a hundred years old-- and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." ²³ The words "**it was credited to him**" were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness-- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Now, let's look at James' use of the example of Abraham.

^{NIV} **James 2:17**...In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "**You have faith; I have deeds.**" Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder. ²⁰ You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was

not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "**Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,**" and he was called God's friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

The problem is that if we understand James to be speaking about saving faith before God, it means that he and Paul are using the same word to mean two entirely different things. However, there are a few issues within the text of James that help us to understand that he and Paul were, in fact, talking about two different things. That difference is the difference between the faith that God sees and accepts and the faith that one man can see in another and recognize. That is why verse 14 is so important in understanding James.

^{NIV} **James 2:14**...What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

James is addressing not a fully fleshed-out doctrine of justification but the question of whether a profession of faith is adequate to save and he makes it clear that it is not. Really what he is asking is, "**Can this kind of faith, a faith that produces no fruit of righteousness, actually be a saving faith?**" One theologian argues that what James is addressing here is the form of antinomianism that will boast of a faith that is completely devoid of works.

Verse 18, makes that point even clearer. Genuine justifying faith is a demonstrable thing.

James 2:18...But someone will say, "**You have faith; I have deeds.**" Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You

believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.
²⁰ You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

So, Paul and James are talking about two different issues. Paul is concerned with how a sinner may be considered righteous before the judgment seat of God. He is talking about the gospel of justification. James is talking about observable faith. He is talking about having a faith that is visible by those around us. Of course, there are dangers here. I like, however, what Sproul says at this point. He is reminded of Jesus words, "**Wisdom is justified by her children**". The obvious point of Jesus' words is that genuine wisdom is observed only by the fruit or actions of someone's behavior. That is the point James is making. James knew that Abraham had faith prior to the sacrifice of Isaac. He alludes to Abraham's faith when he says:

^{NIV} **James 2:22**...You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

You see the faith was already there and the result of the Abraham's work is that his faith became perfected, not in the sense of being totally perfect but in the sense of demonstrating its maturity. That is why I like what Calvin had to say about James in the Institutes.

If it is absurd to say that the effect was prior to its cause, either Moses falsely declares in that passage that Abraham's faith was imputed for righteousness **or** Abraham, by his obedience in offering up Isaac, did not merit righteousness. Before the existence of Ishmael, who was a grown youth at the birth of Isaac, Abraham was justified by his faith. How then can we say that he obtained justification by an obedience which followed long after? Wherefore, either James erroneously inverts the proper order, **(this it were impious to suppose,)** or he meant not to say that he was justified, as if he deserved to be deemed just. What then? It appears certain that he is speaking of the **manifestation**, not of the

imputation of righteousness, as if he had said those who are justified by true faith prove their justification by obedience and good works, not by a bare and imaginary semblance of faith. In one word, he is not discussing the mode of justification, but requiring that the justification of believers shall be operative.
Calvin, Institutes 3.17.12

So you could say that Paul is concerned about vertical faith that is faith before God. Our justification before God must be accomplished apart from works. What works would we have that could justify? James, on the other hand, is concerned about our horizontal justification, that is, our justification before men. How will anyone ever know we are justified if we demonstrate no appropriate behavior?

Now, before I go on, I would like to add a measure of comfort. There is a tendency, particularly on the part of Reformed people, to put their lives under the microscope of constant scrutiny, to examine every thought, intention and deed to determine whether or not they are in the faith. I once had a friend, who was a good man and who loved the Lord, who told me that no man could ever know that he was a genuine believer until he died. I have to say, I don't believe that for a moment. I mean just looking at the introduction of Paul's letter to the Ephesians we sense something else altogether. Paul is convinced of the Ephesians' faith and prays that God will enlighten their minds to fully comprehend just how wonderful their salvation is. Elsewhere John claims that he wrote what he wrote in order that brothers and sisters may know that they have eternal life, which leads me to try to offer comfort to those who have weighed their lives in the balance of good works and found themselves wanting.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever seriously thought about your failure to live as you ought? Have you ever despaired thinking that maybe the work of

grace that you had hoped for was just not genuine? Does it break your heart that you are not growing in your sanctification faster than you are? Are you driven anew to the mercies of Christ? If you are, then my friend I can assure you that the Spirit of God is doing His work. He is perfecting you in Christ until the day God finally redeems us all from this body of sin. If you are concerned about whether you are being pleasing to Christ, you are already demonstrating fruit that no unbeliever could ever possess.

My real concern is not...and please hear how I say this...for you. My real anguish is for the man or woman among us that is just ambivalent to all this. My real concern is for the man or woman that has no more genuine affection for Christ than for their favorite athlete, or soap star, or favorite pet. Brothers and sisters, if you are here this morning and there is no genuine affection for the person of Christ, if you are not smitten by your failure to desire a life of holiness, or to grow in your sanctification, then I beg you, I plead with you to throw yourself on God's mercy. He is able to transform your mind and your heart and if you can't do that confess your inability to Him and ask Him to regenerate your heart so that these new-found affections will begin to stir in your heart of stone.

To help make this point clear I have two quotes. The first is from a famous reformer. **"We are saved by faith alone, but it is a faith that is never alone."** And if that doesn't help I like the way Luther once answered the question, **"Do you mean that my justification is so removed from my works, that I can do whatever I want?"** To which Luther answered, **"Yes, now what it is you want to do?"**

Do you see his point? If we are really saved, if our faith is genuine, we will want to please Him. We will want to live in gratitude for all that He has already done for us. Isn't it strange how much that sounds like Paul in his prayer for the Ephesians?

Are there questions?

Now, in addition to the question about Abraham I was also given a question about the grammatical lesson I gave. You will remember that there were three words that the word **"that"** could have pointed back to. I said that the word **"that"** in Ephesians 2:8 referred back to the whole of our salvation. Well, I almost said that. What I actually said was:

That means that it is more likely that **"that"** points to the verb **"have been saved"** which has no gender. I know you hate to hear me say it again but I think Calvin was probably right. The whole of our salvation is the result of God's gracious kindness exercised toward us in the saving work of Christ.

What I should have said or at least been clearer about was that the word **"that"** points back to the whole act of our salvation instead of just the word **"saved"**. It is what I meant but I was not very clear and I appreciate your pointing it out.

I was also given the following question:

How would verse 8 be understood if **"that"** pointed back to faith?

It would be understood something like this.

For by God's kindness you have been saved through faith; and even that faith is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

I did remark that there were several other passages where biblical writers pose that idea. I have no problem with the idea. I just don't think that is what Paul is trying to get across here. I think Paul is trying to get the Ephesians to see that the whole of their salvation is a marvelous act of God's grace.

Then I was also given the question what if **"that"** pointed back to grace? It would be roughly the same kind of translation.

For by God's kindness you have been saved through faith; and even that grace is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Obviously, that doesn't make much sense. It would be redundant. By its very definition **"grace"** being God's kindness cannot be the result of anything we have done.

Finally, I was given this question.

Is there a way in Greek, Paul could have said **"all that"** or **"all those things"**?

This is a great question. The answer is yes and Paul used just that word. By using the neuter phrase **"that"**, he was actually saying something very close to **"that thing"** or "the whole deal". Obviously, **"the whole deal"** is more East Texas than most of you can deal with, but that is close to the idea.

Finally, I was given this question.

If we create our faith is it not a work?

Again, it is a great question. The answer, however, is no. Of course, we don't create faith. Faith is the result of being regenerated or born again. But even if it were not, it would still not be a work, because it is nothing more than the act of receiving. It is the act of an open hand.

Dr. Rod Rosenblatt uses an illustration of a drowning man who is being swept away by the strong current of a rushing river. He says, **“Imagine someone throws that drowning man a life-ring and the man grabs the ring and is pulled to safety only to get out of the water and say, ‘Did you see that hand? Did you notice the way that hand reached out and grabbed that ring? Did you notice the way that hand hung on? I am so grateful that my hand was able to save me?’”**

Of course, that never happens. Instead such people tremble with gratitude and thanksgiving to those that threw the ring and pulled them in. In fact, I really like the way one of Dr. Rosenblatt's friends corrected his illustration. He said the only problem with it is that the Bible portrays the rescued man as already quite drowned. It portrays the man and long since dead rushing along in the strong current completely unaware of the danger.

So what is faith? It is belief having three components: knowledge, acceptance, and trust. It is trust based upon the revealed and believed facts of the gospel.

Now with all that out of the way, we are ready for this weeks lesson. Let's look at the rest of chapter 2 starting in verse 11.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 2:11**...Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Now, obviously we don't have any time left to dig through these precious verses. So what I want to do is just outline their content. I also want to give you a brief assignment.

First, the passage can be divided into three parts: (1) what we were in the past. Your assignment is to list the different phrases that Paul uses to describe our past estate. (11-12)

Secondly, there is a description of what Christ has done for us. Your assignment is to list out what Christ has accomplished on our behalf. (13-18)

Thirdly, Paul explains our current state. Your assignment is to list the ways in which Paul describes our current state. (19-22)

Finally, there was a warning written on the wall of the temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple. What was the warning and how is it relevant to this passage?

Any questions?

Let's pray.