

pretending to be "nice" and good and simply be myself, my desperate need for God is obvious to everyone (even me!).

Obviously, I'm not advocating that Christians sin on purpose so that the grace of God can be seen all the more clearly. (The Apostle Paul addresses such silliness in Romans 6.) All I'm saying is that Christians—of all people—ought to be genuine, what-you-see-is-what-you-get kinds of people. We Christians ought to be humble enough to be painfully transparent so that what God is doing in us can be readily seen by even the most casual observer.

The Apostle Paul says it best in 2 Corinthians 12:10 when he says (and here I paraphrase just a bit):

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in my weaknesses which are made apparent when I am insulted, when I undergo hardships, persecutions and difficulties—when I have difficulty coping with and standing up under the stresses and strains of life and living. For when I am weak, then I am strong: that's when the power of God is most visible at work in me!"

In a nutshell its all called humility: simply being what you are openly and without pretense, so that people may readily see what God has done and is doing in you to change your life by changing you. Its an amazing concept, isn't it? We glorify God by simply being ourselves and letting God be Himself.

Amazing.

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## **MORMON MATTERS (PART 7)**

### **The Faith/Works Issue**

By Robert Sivulka

#### Introduction

In this article I will look at whether the death of Christ was a sufficient condition for the world's atonement or only a necessary one. In other words, is Christ's death all we need as payment for our sins that alienate us from God, or do we also need to add something to that sacrifice, viz., our good works? Put even more simply, do we need to do good works in order to merit God's favor and give us eternal life?

The Christian position has been absolutely no, we cannot add anything to Christ's perfect sacrifice (Christians will use, for example, the following verses to support their position: Titus 3:5, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8 & 9, Romans 4:5, 11:6, & Isaiah 64:6). The Mormon position has been that Christ's sacrifice is definitely needed, but it certainly is not sufficient as payment for our sins. We also need to merit God's favor by the performance of good works. This position

is summarized in the Mormon Church's third article of faith, "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."

Now I cannot possibly get through all the arguments that Mormons bring up for their defense, but I will limit this article to the discussion over the most popular defense. That defense is the famous problem passage in James 2:14-26... "faith, if it hath not works, is dead" (vs. 17).

#### The Debate

According to the Mormons' eighth article of faith, "the Bible" is "the word of God as far as it is translated correctly." And according to their understanding, the Bible has naturally undergone many changes in translations through the centuries. After the apostles died out, the authority of God was taken from the earth, and wicked men perverted the word of God by changing it to meet their fancies. As corruptible men, they did not do a perfect job in maintaining its consistency, and that is why we have contradictions like whether one is saved by faith alone, or by faith and works. And how are we ever to sift through this mess to hold to the truth? God has been so gracious to restore his truth in these latter days through His prophets and apostles. As a result, we know that we should hold to James and reject the emendations of Paul's writings by some corrupt scribes.

Christians, on the other hand, do not find any evidence of all these emendations with the Bible. Surely with all the thousands of early manuscripts, if the Mormons were correct, there would be two different sets of the apostle Paul's writings, for example: one which corresponds with what the Mormons believe today, and one which corresponds with the present "corrupt" form in all our various translations. Since there was not any manuscript evidence of this, Joseph Smith did some emendations himself in his "Joseph Smith Translation." Here, to make his theology consistent, he corrected Romans 4:5, for example, to say that God "justifies not the ungodly." And for Mormons to believe that this is actually the way it was originally written by the apostle Paul is a sheer act of "blind faith" (well, practically blind faith, since the subjective burning in their bosoms must count for something, albeit very little).

So if the evidence points to both Paul's and James' writings being in the original text, how are they to be reconciled? No less of a theologian than Martin Luther had many a headache over this question, and concluded that James must be an "epistle of straw". He still accepted it as canonical, but he never really figured out how to reconcile it with the forcefully clear

writings of Paul on the subject. I submit to you that instead of actually contradicting each other, both apostles are speaking of faith and justification (i.e., declaring one righteous) in two different senses.

For two things or statements to be contradictory to each other they need to be referring to the same time and same sense. For example, the two statements "it is raining" and "it is not raining" are not necessarily contradictory to each other. Why? Because one statement may be referring to California, while the other one is referring to Utah. Or both statements may refer to the same place, but be referring to different times when uttered.

Similarly, when the apostles are speaking of whether faith is sufficient to justify, there may de facto be two different senses of faith being referred to as well as two different senses of justification. My understanding is that James only appears to be contradicting the rest of Scripture since he is dealing with merely professing faith or phony faith whereas Paul is dealing with saving faith or genuine faith. J. Vernon McGee once said, "Paul and James do not stand face to face, fighting against each other, but they stand back to back, fighting opposite foes." Paul was fighting the legalist, who claimed that works were necessary to merit God's favor, while James was fighting the antinomians, who claimed that we need not concern ourselves with keeping the law period. Paul and James are also dealing with different points of time. The former was concerned with the point of regeneration, while the latter was concerned with the points of sanctification.

Nice theory, but can I prove it? Let us look more closely at the James passage. In verse 14, the individual claims to have genuine saving faith, but James never says he really has it. By asking if faith can save him, James is asking a rhetorical question and expecting a negative response. Now the Greek here indicates it is not faith in general, but a particular kind of faith (literally, "can this faith save?"). I submit this is merely professing faith and not genuine faith. Paul even makes reference to this kind of faith when he mentions "believing in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:2).

Even the apostle Paul declared that genuine faith, on the other hand, does in fact work (Gal. 5:6 & 2 Cor. 13:5). John Calvin put it this way, "Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone." Vss. 15 & 16 give a practical illustration of someone who obviously does not have this genuine faith. If someone is not taking care of people at his door, he obviously does not have genuine faith.

Thus, a faith without works (vs. 17) is a dead phony faith. A genuine faith will be shown in its works. We cannot see faith directly; it is immaterial. But we can see it indirectly by what is produced by it.

Jameison, Fausset and Brown say in their commentary, "The tree shows its life by its fruits, but it was alive before either fruits or even leaves appeared."

In verse 19, James says that saving faith is not mere intellectual assent in God's existence. In the following verses, James contrasts this intellectual assent with the works of Abraham and Rahab, which justified them. In order to make this consistent with Paul, who said anything about God justifying the ungodly that do not work, we need to see James as speaking of a justification to men. Further, Genesis 15:6 & 22:1-14 teaches that Abraham was justified long before he performed the good work of sacrificing Isaac. Only God can see faith directly prior to any works which demonstrate what kind of faith it really is. We all must examine ourselves to see if we are really in the faith or not (2 Cor. 13:5). The best test for this is love as the epistle of John speaks of. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

### Conclusion

Our actions are done because of who we are. If we have really been born again through genuine faith, we will love one another. This shows not only others that we have been changed, but ourselves as well.

So the Scripture is consistent. James is not contradicting Paul in how one becomes justified. We must preach the good news that our debt has been completely taken away by the cross of Christ.

The intent of our actions is completely different from those of Mormons. Ours is to evidence our faith, whereas for the Mormons, it is to gain God's approval and salvation.

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### **News You Can Use**

*This month's News You Can Use comes from Dag Hammar skjöld's classic book of meditations Markings.*

- How can you expect to keep your powers of hearing when you never want to listen? That God should have time for you, you seem to take as much for granted as that you cannot have time for Him.
- The devils enter uninvited when the house stands empty. For other kinds of guests, you have first to open the door.
- You cannot play with the animal in you without becoming wholly animal, play with falsehood