

## Faith and Works

The Oxford Dictionary identifies paradox as *"A seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which, when investigated, may prove to be well founded or true."* As we search the scriptures, we find many statements that seem to be contradicted by other statements. False teachers will take these statements out of context, trying to prove their position. But a Christian, believing the Bible to be 100% correct and accurate, will investigate the text and find the solution to the perceived contradiction.

The Bible uses statements of contrast to complement one another and reveal a fuller picture of truth. But when pulled out of context, these Scripture segments can be misunderstood, twisted, and stripped of their true meaning. All Christians should understand a few of the statements that are used by evangelicals and novelists. Paramount among them are the ones used to teach the falsehood of "faith only apart from works" doctrine. We examine a few of their points in the following discussion.

**The Worthless workman.** *"... when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"* (Luke 17:7-10). The false teaching presented from this passage is that all servants, "workers" for God, are worthless. They ignore the final clause of verse 10, *"we have done only that which we ought to have done,"* which implies that the master is satisfied with the work performed. The truth is the Master, Jesus Christ, trains us to do the works He has ordered us to do. *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10). We are the workmanship of God, trained by Christ, to do precisely what He wants us to do. Nothing more and nothing less. The passage quoted most often by the "faith only" people is the very one that speaks of our being trained workers. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). They never quote verse 10 because it alludes to the good works we are trained to do.

**Works only.** Another passage where false teachers insert the word only, or alone, is (Romans 3:28), *"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."* They interpret that faith apart from works means that "faith only saves a person." Although Paul refers to works commanded under Moses' Law, works under man's laws are also included. There is nothing that a person can do to earn or receive salvation from sin and eternal separation from God. Romans 4 is devoted to showing that God declared Abraham righteous because of his active, obedient faith (Romans 4:21-22). If Abraham had not obeyed the works given to him, Isaac would not have been born, Israel would not have become a nation, and Jesus would not have been born according to the promises. But Abraham performed the works, even offering his son. *"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son"* (Hebrews 11:17). James refers to this when he wrote, *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?"* (James 2:21).

We are tested, as Abraham was, by the "works" given by God. Therefore, a relationship exists between faith and works. *"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself"* (James 2:14-17).

Even two of the more popular Bible versions read, *"So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless"* (James 2:17 NLT), and *"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead"* (James 2:17 NIV).

There is no checklist of things to do. As people learn and grow in the Spirit, each person sees works that all must do and other works that they excel in. Not everyone does the same things. But Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 to 6:9 are excellent places to start. James also provides this advice, *"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves ... If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world"* (James 1:22-27). The question for every Christian becomes, "Do my actions prove that I have a strong faith in my Savior?"