

IV. ARE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS OBLIGATED TO BELIEVE AND OBEY GOD AND DO GOOD WORKS IN ORDER TO BE SAVED?

A text frequently brought up in this connection is James 2:14-26 –

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 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? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 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. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 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. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

However, this passage in James 2 must be compared with Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8-9 – "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."

How can these two passages – the one in James 2, the other in Ephesians 2 – be reconciled?

In James 2:17 it speaks of "faith by itself, . . . not accompanied by action." In verse 18 it speaks of "faith without deeds," and in verse 22 of faith being "made complete." In verse 24 it speaks of "faith alone."

In Ephesians 2 faith is contrasted with works, and it says that we have been saved through faith, not through works.