

## **CONTRADICTION?**

**Scripture Reading:** Read James 2

As believers in Jesus Christ, we proclaim the Bible to be the inspired, infallible and authoritative Word of God. God breathed it. It is without error. It is the rule for faith and conduct. Yet, there are times when we're reading the Scripture and alarm bells go off because it seems like we find a contradiction. It can be troubling to our faith. Take today's chapter reading for example. Three times James makes a similar assertion.

**2:17 - In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

**2:24 - You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.**

**2:27 - As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.**

James seems convinced that faith alone does not save. Yet, if this is accurate then how do we square what he writes with what Paul states 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.***

So, which is it? Faith alone or not by faith alone? Do we have a contradiction? It certainly looks like it at face value. However, when you dig a little below the surface you realize that they are approaching the issue from different vantage points. Paul, coming out of a legalistic background as a Pharisee, was brought to the realization that nothing he could do would earn or merit his salvation. There were not enough good deeds he could do for God to make him acceptable. James, on the other hand, was writing to believers who were not living the faith they claimed to have. They were compromising with the world, trying to have it both ways. They were great talkers but poor walkers when it came to doing the word.

Looked at from this perspective, we now understand there is no contradiction. Paul writes about the root of our salvation, how we get into the kingdom. James writes about the fruit of our salvation, how we look and act once we we're in the kingdom. For Paul, there was no place for dead works but, there was a place for good deeds that flowed from faith: "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works...*" (Ephesians 2:10). For James, there was no place for dead faith but there was a place for living faith in a God who "*chose to give us birth through the word of truth*" (James 1:18). It's not either/or but both/and. Both faith and works are important but each in its rightful place. As Martin Luther, the great reformer of the faith, put it, "Faith alone saves. But, faith that saves is never alone." Contradiction? Nah, not a chance.

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** Read Titus 3:4-8 in light of today's devotional. See if you can identify the both/and of faith and works present in this passage. In prayer, take a look at your spiritual orchard. Make sure God has planted a solid root of faith and that you are walking with him to produce the fruit of faith.

**Take-a-way:** *Faith is the root and works are the fruit of our salvation.*