

Justification By Faith #3
Faith and Works
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. The last two Sundays we've been looking at the concept of justification by faith

1. It is definitely a biblical concept
 - a. the Bible plainly says that we are justified by faith
 - b. faith is what connects us with the sacrifice of Jesus which provides forgiveness of sins

2. We also looked at Paul's contrast of the two laws by which one may seek to be made right with God
 - a. the Law of Works
 - 1) an effort to stand right before God based on some worth or merit of one's own actions
 - 2) this effort is doomed to failure because of two simple facts
 - a) the demand of such a law is total, complete perfection
 - b) all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory
 - c) therefore, it is impossible to be justified by a law of works
 - b. the Law of faith
 - 1) an effort to stand right before God based on the worth and merit of Jesus Christ
 - 2) this effort succeeds because of two simple facts
 - a) we appeal to the perfect, sinless life of Jesus given as a sacrifice on our behalf
 - b) by faith, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is counted as our own, and we are justified before the Father
 - c) therefore, the only way to be justified is by a law of faith

B. Christians sometimes have a problem with this whole idea

1. The counter to the idea of justification by faith is that there is more to it than just faith – we have to “do something” to be saved

2. This is mostly a reaction demanded by a perversion of the biblical idea of faith that relegates it to only a part of its real meaning
 - a. today, a great many people think that “faith” means simply to believe
 - b. sadly, we often give in to the same definition, so when we hear someone speak of justification by faith, what we hear them saying is justification by belief (usually with the addition of the word “only”)
 - c. the problem is not with the idea of justification by faith, it is with the mistaken definition of the meaning of faith

3. Hebrews 11:6 -- And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
NASU
 - a. I keep coming back to this verse for it is an excellent practical definition
 - b. included is both ideas of belief and action, the real biblical concept of faith

C. Today, I want to look briefly at the idea of faith and works

I. ARE THERE “WORKS” ASSOCIATED WITH JUSTIFICATION?

A. “No,” if you’re talking about works of merit by which we somehow earn or deserve God’s Saving favor

1. Acts 4:12 -- "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." NASU
2. Now, either that idea is true or it's not
 - a. if it's not true, then the statement is not just wrong, it is a lie
 - b. if it's true, then we are going to have to stop saying that anything man does produces anything toward his salvation or justification
3. This is what the apostle Paul attacked in both Romans and Galatians
 - a. Rom 3:28 -- For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. NASU
 - b. Gal 2:16 -- nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. NASU

B. “Yes,” if you asking if faith includes obedient action on our part to the belief and trust we Place in Jesus Christ

1. Gal 5:5-6 -- For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. NASU
2. 1 Thess 1:2-3 -- We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, NASU
3. 2 Thess 1:11-12 -- To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. NASU
4. The biblical concept of faith has never relegated it to belief alone
 - a. Hebrews 11:6 -- And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. NASU
 - b. this is why this statement of faith is so instructive
 - 1) you must have faith to please God
 - 2) how does the Hebrew writer explain the process of pleasing God
 - a) by believing that he exists
 - b) by seeking what you believe
 - c) the seeking is a work of faith and finishes out what belief begins

II. THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

A. Abraham is perhaps the Bible's best example of a man said to have been justified before God

1. He is also the source of some great controversy
 - a. Paul seems to say that Abraham was justified by faith
 - b. James seems to say that works justified Abraham
 - c. we often pit one against the other, needlessly, for in truth they do not conflict with one another, rather they support one another
2. If you think James is suggesting something different from Paul, I think you have missed something very important

B. A look at Abraham's justification

1. Genesis 15:1ff (read)
2. Paul referenced Abraham's faith and declared that it was faith that justified him
 - a. Rom 4:1-5 -- What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, NASU
 - b. Paul's emphasis is on Abraham's trusting belief in God's promise
 - c. Abraham realized that he did not accomplish a thing on his own, instead it God who promised and God who would bring it about
 - d. when Abraham believed God, righteousness was credited to him as a favor – he neither earned it, nor deserved it, instead, grace connected with faith and the result was that he was made right with God
3. James referenced Abraham's works and declared that it justified him
 - a. Paul and James were clearing up two different kinds of problems
 - 1) Paul addressed the idea that a man could be justified by works of merit, somehow deserving his stand with God
 - 2) Paul said that kind of thing just won't work, instead we are justified by faith apart from works of merit
 - b. James, however, addressed a different problem altogether
 - 1) James attacked the idea that faith has no "works" or action to it
 - 2) he attacked the idea that somehow faith consists only of what one believes with no action following
 - 3) James 2:14 -- What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? NASU
 - 4) James isn't talking about works of merit, he's talking about works of faith

4. So, when James references Abraham, he necessarily speaks of Abraham's faith
 - a. Genesis 22:1ff – Abraham's offering of Isaac on the altar
 - b. Heb 11:17-19 -- By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. NASU
 - c. James 2:21-24 -- Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. NASU

C. Paul and James do not conflict with one another

1. Justification is by faith
2. Faith is a trusting belief that moves a person to act in harmony with what he believes and trusts
 - a. he makes no effort to earn anything through his actions
 - b. his faith is an appeal of trust in God
 - c. but neither does he sit on his hands with an empty faith – he acts in ways that are perfectly consistent with what he believes

CONCLUSION

A. Real faith involves action, obedience, seeking to do the will of God

1. It simply is not a mental exercise alone
2. Real faith acts (the whole point of the faith examples in Hebrews 11)

B. Such faith, results in justification because we demonstrate our trust in Jesus Christ

1. God's grace provides the Savior, the pure sacrifice for sin, the one and only answer to our need to be made right with the Father
2. Man's faith is the only thing that can connect with God's grace and by it accept the free gift offered in Jesus Christ

C. Invitation