

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

Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

What does this mean? Does this prove the Bible contradicts itself? How can we make sense out of James 2 and Romans 3?

CONTEXT! CONTEXT! CONTEXT!

Romans and James do not contradict one another, they compliment one another. Certainly, if one were to just read James 2:24 and Romans 3:28 they would have a legitimate problem. However, that would be a foolish way of reading any book. Would I just pick up *War and Peace* and turn to page 293 and read the fifth sentence of the second paragraph and then proceed to tell you what the book was about? No, of course not. So, why would someone do that with the Bible? Let us look at the context (as a whole) of Romans and James and then we will see how it all fits together.

First, James 2:24 literally translated is “justification *out of/from* works.” James uses the preposition *ἐκ* (ek), whereas, Paul uses an entirely different preposition with a different thrust to it. Paul uses *διὰ* (dia) and thus “*through/by means of* faith.” This is a subtle, but major point because it shows that the two authors are coming from two different perspectives. For Paul in the book of Romans, he speaks to the personal inward appropriation of righteousness through faith (that is, how does salvation really occur from God’s perspective). James addresses the question of how the righteous are identifiable in the world (that is, how is a saved person known by everyone else to be a follower of Jesus). For Paul the question is: How do I know that I am saved? For James the question is: How does the world around me know that I am saved? Thus, Abraham was accepted as righteous before God through faith (Paul), but he was recognized as righteous to the world and to the succession of believers of all time through his willing obedience to sacrifice his son Isaac at God’s command (James). The believer through faith accepts Christ’s righteousness as his own and is viewed righteous by God (Paul). By works and good deeds the follower of Jesus vindicates God’s verdict of righteousness on him by demonstrating to the world the correctness of the verdict which is that works flow from the heart of faith (James).

How am I saved? By God’s grace alone through faith alone (Paul). Will a saved person be extremely lazy, sit on his or her backside and do nothing, show no love towards others, not try to obey God, etc.? Absolutely not, the converted follower responds by doing works and good deeds, for these are proof that the faith that saved is genuine and distinguishes the saved to the rest of the world (James). James was writing to try to wake up lazy believers who were basically saying, “I believe, so now I’m not going to do anything and I have no responsibility to do anything. I’ll just wait for Jesus to come again.” Hence, faith without works is dead. A faithful heart will respond with works, that is works *EK* (flow from, out of) faith.