

Did Paul and James Agree on Salvation?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Upon reading the epistle of James one day, the great Reformation leader, Martin Luther, exclaimed: This made me so upset, I nearly threw Jimmy into the fire of my woodstove. Luther, of course, sparked the entire Protestant Reformation with a clarion cry that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, and not by works. So, when Luther encountered the Apostle James apparently declaring we *are* saved by works, Luther was confused. He is not the only one. Many in Church history have wondered if there was a disagreement between the apostles Paul and James. Well, today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into James to see what he actually teaches.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the third episode of a four-part series we are doing pondering how we get saved, and in particular, wondering about how grace and works are related when it comes to salvation. So, in the first program, we looked at the vital biblical concept of covenant, and we traced covenant all the way from the Old Testament into the New Testament, and to the new covenant in Christ's blood.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; in the second program, we focused on the Apostle Paul, and among other things, what Paul wrote in the book of Ephesians; and in this episode, we are going to turn to James to see if there is really a conflict between what Paul wrote about being saved by grace alone, and what James wrote about how we need works to be saved as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, in the first part, Darrell, of this episode, let's take a bird's eye view of the whole letter, and then in the second two parts of the program, we will dig into some specifics to go with our theme here on grace and works and so forth.

But let's just listen to how the letter begins, and then we will step back for an overview:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. ²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, James is going right in as soon as he starts the letter. I believe that James would want to make sure that you get across what type of situations you are going to experience as a believer. You are going to have some

hardships; you are going to have some trials; and he is one who is speaking from experience, isn't he, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, yes; we will note in just a minute that he knows about trials; but James is uncompromising...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is fiercely uncompromising. But first, let's just take and note a minute that in the Greek text, Darrell, he identifies, not as James, but as Jacob, which is the name of one of Jesus' half-brothers, as a child of Mary and Joseph. And Jacob seems to have come to be called James after he took over the Jerusalem church and its community of Jewish people who had been converted to faith in Jesus as the Christ. So, we think that Jacob/James led the church through, really, twenty difficult years. It was years of famine and persecution, and at the end of all that, James himself was martyred...he was murdered for his faith. But he was regarded as a staunch pillar of the early Church. We read about him in the book of Acts, and Paul mentioned him in Galatians. Galatians will be the theme of our fourth and final program in this series, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, I don't know where this idea came from, but Jesus being born to Mary and Joseph, I don't know why some people thought he was an only child, but when he talked about how a prophet is not received in his home town, the people said: Isn't this Jesus with his brothers? And James is one of those mentioned...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

In that...and then sisters...brothers and sisters we know. So, he had a pretty big family, and it doesn't seem that James came to faith when Jesus was here, and he didn't follow him. He was not one of the twelve disciples, but later on he became a pillar of the faith, like you said, and a leader in the Church. And this book, I really appreciate. I think I consider it to be one of the most profound books to teach us about what God requires for our lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is interesting...it is a letter, but you know, basically all thirteen of Paul's letters were addressed to a very specific community: Galatia, Ephesus, Corinth...but this is not written to a particular group. In fact, it says it is to the twelve scattered tribes of Israel...

DARRELL DELANEY

The diaspora...yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; probably addressed to multiple communities of people that were made up by Jews who had come to accept Jesus as Christ and Lord. Another thing that you could pick up a little bit there: Scholars note that in James you pick up echoes of two things that James knew well: 1) His brother's Sermon on the Mount; and 2) The Old Testament book of Proverbs. There are a lot of parts of James that come off sounding like the wisdom literature in the Bible.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, I think that some scholars actually consider it to be the New Testament proverbs, because it comes off as wisdom literature: Here is what you need to do. It has this fatherly...my son, listen to me kind of tone to it, even though he is talking to male and female believers all over who are being persecuted for their faith. He wants them to not compromise it; he also wants them to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and on that score, he is uncompromising, as we said. Everything he talks about is black or white; there are no shades of gray. Lots of either/or statements. Not too many both/ands. He is kind of a drill sergeant of a writer, barking out commands and orders left and right. In fact, scholars have observed that fifty-six percent of the letter...so, just over half...sixty of the letter's one hundred eight verses...are in the imperative mood. So, half of the letter...just over half the letter is James issuing commands and statements, and giving out blunt orders on how to behave and how to think and how to believe. I mean, he is just relentless.

DARRELL DELANEY

He really is, and not relentless on one topic. He is kind of giving you a full spread of different topics that he speaks on. It is not like you can follow one point through the entire book.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He wants the believer to have the handbook that they need in order to live, in order to please the Lord; or live in the way that honors Christ; and so, he covers a variety of topics.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Chapters 2-5...there are about twelve teaching sections...and like you said, they don't really flow together. It is a little like Proverbs. It is just like: Here is a proverb about this; here is a proverb about that; here is a proverb about that; it just keeps changing topics a little bit. There are a couple of things, though, that emerge a little bit more often than others, and that is: James is very concerned about our speech; how we use our tongues, and in particular, he decries hypocrisy: You say one thing to one person, you say the opposite thing to somebody else. James is grieved that we can use our tongues to hurt people and wound people and judge people and gossip about people; and he is simply aghast that people seem to think that all week long you can use your mouth to hurt people, but then on Sunday it is okay to praise God with your mouth when you go to church. James had no patience with that kind of hypocrisy.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; he makes that very clear, that, I mean, he says specifically in his book that one faucet cannot do sweet water and salt water at the same time. Neither should it be that way with our tongues. He does realize that the tongue is powerful, and you can use it for good or for ill; and he recommends that we choose it for good; and he is showing that example by how he has written this text; but also, he is showing us what we need to do in the way he teaches.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then another major concern...and we heard this in those first eight verses we just read, Darrell...and this will be really important when we turn to the next part of the program to specifically faith, grace and works...James wants us to be whole and complete people, lacking nothing. That is what he said in that passage we read. Some older translations say that James wants you to be *perfect*, but in the Bible, perfect does not mean that you never sin, it just means you are consistent; you are not hypocritical; you don't say one thing but do something else. It is to be a person of shalom, of integrity; someone whose word can be trusted by others. So, completeness; and this is going to be really important for what we dig into next in terms of the relationship of grace and works as James sees that. So, we are going to dig into those texts in just a moment. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

Darrell Delaney:

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, we just did an overview of the letter of James, but we are looking at this letter as part of our *Groundwork* series on questions surrounding how we get saved. Are we saved by grace alone, through faith alone, as Paul so clearly wrote in places like Ephesians and Romans? But if so, then what about our works? What about good deeds; and we noted at the outset of this program that the great Reformation leader, Martin Luther, was quite unsettled by James; and if we had to isolate one verse to explain Luther's discomfiture, here it is: James 2:24, where he writes:

[So,] You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and *not* by faith alone.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I can see why that would make Luther pull his hair out, because he built his entire theology on the fact that we are saved by grace, through faith alone; no works; no contribution from us; and if you read this incorrectly, you could kind of pick up...I mean, it is saying it right there: What I do matters; and is it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not by faith alone?

DARRELL DELANEY

Contributing to my righteousness, though? That is the question that we are struggling with, and I can see why it would look like Paul and James are at odds.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; they are not seeing eye to eye, and this is a pretty important thing to not see eye to eye on, if that is the case. You know, Darrell, let's just be clear. If there really were a rift between Paul and James on as important a topic as how we get saved, that would be a real problem...you know, that would be a real problem if that were actually true that they disagreed on how we get saved.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; we would have more schisms than anything else. We would have more divisions and more breakups and more denominations than we do now if we could not get this straight. There are people who are falling on different sides of this that are not understanding it, but the Bible is not contradictory, is it, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; a key tenet in hermeneutics...and that is the big word for how we interpret the Bible...a key point in particular Reformed hermeneutics, but lots of hermeneutics...scripture interprets scripture and the Bible never contradicts itself. Now, we have noted before, Darrell, on *Groundwork*, that there are some things in the Bible where there is a progressively deeper understanding over time. Maybe, as you move from the Old Testament to the New, we saw that: What happens to us after we die? Well, Israel believed in something called *Sheol*, but that was not quite the complete picture. In the New Testament, we get to Paradise...

DARRELL DELANEY

Abraham's bosom...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we get to go be with the Lord while we await the resurrection of the body. So, some things in scripture are progressively deepening as you go along, but that is different than a clear disagreement. You cannot say one part of the Bible says $2+2=4$, and another part says, no, $2+2=5$. That would be a real problem. In terms of Paul and James, if they genuinely disagreed, that would be a real problem biblically.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is interesting that you said $2+2$ is 4, because I was thinking about James 2:24 when you said that. We need a fuller context of what is going on in James. So, how about we zoom out and look at the earlier

passages before that passage that you read just now. Let's start at verse 14, where it says: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

SCOTT HOEZEE

²⁰You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴[So] you see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. ²⁵In 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? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a really powerful connection that James is making here between faith and deeds. He is saying something about completeness; he is saying something about faith accompanied with action; and that is his main theme. He is saying that without the action, the faith is useless. So, how do we understand this, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are right. There is an airtight connection here for James. If you have true faith, then you will have deeds. If you claim to have faith and have no deeds, then he says that is not even real faith. It is useless; it is dead. Twice here he says it is dead. That is pretty useless.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think he is saying, Darrell, faith cannot be merely an intellectual phenomenon. It is not just about believing the right things. I mean, even here James...again, he is relentless...we said that; he is so direct. He says here: Oh, you believe in God? Well, good on ya, but hey; the demons do too, so what else ya got?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Big deal if it is all up in your head. So, that would just be a useless faith—a dead faith—a fake faith.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, you know, he talks about how if you have faith that is accompanied by actions, it is making your faith complete.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

It makes your work come together; and so, he is saying that these two need to be showing up with each other, and one is not the replacement for the other; and so, if you have faith and you are not doing anything with your faith, then you really don't have it; you have an illusion; you don't have faith in what Christ can do at

all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; you know, we said there are echoes of the Sermon on the Mount in James; and indeed, here is kind of one of them. Think about the Beatitudes that we did a series on here on *Groundwork*, and we had the scholar Danny Daley with us, who says: What the Beatitudes sketch is the ideal disciple; and that is what we become. We get changed by grace. We become people who desire to do merciful and kind and gracious deeds, and then we become people who actually *do* all those merciful, kind, and generous deeds. Again, one without the other, you don't really have either one, in James's thinking here.

One thing to puzzle out here, though, Darrell, is something he says about Abraham.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; he turns to Abraham and he says that the righteousness came through what he did by sacrificing his son Isaac, but then he quotes: Abraham believed God and was it was credited for righteousness. The order is backwards, isn't it? I mean, it is not how it showed up in scripture.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, the binding of Isaac does not happen until Genesis 22, but that line about his faith being credited to him as righteousness is in Genesis 15, seven chapters earlier. So, did James goof? Did he mix things up? No; because what James is really saying is that he knows...he knows that God saved Abraham by grace alone; sure. We saw that in the first program when we looked at covenant and covenant promises. So, God extended grace to Abraham out of a clear, blue sky; but what James is saying is: Yes, Abraham's righteousness was granted to him by grace alone, through faith alone, but because Abraham's faith was real and was legitimate, it naturally showed itself in what he did; and never more powerfully so than when he actually bound his only beloved son to an altar to kill him, because that is how God tested the genuineness of his faith.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really interesting how James ties that together, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the way Paul ties it together. But in just a moment, we are going to draw all these threads together and return to the whole question of Paul versus James, and consider what it means for our daily lives. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

Scott Hoezee:

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we said, Darrell, that a person could read James in such a way to conclude that he thinks we are saved by works and not by faith alone, but we just said clearly James knows we are saved by grace through faith, but he is ardent in his belief that having true faith so completely transforms a person, that good works must follow. So, to invoke kind of a common phrase: We cannot just talk the talk, we gotta walk the walk; and that is James.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is James, and James is keeping his audience in mind. He is talking to the Jews that are spread around and scattered around by the persecution or hardships, but they are trying to live a faith in Jesus, even though they are Jews who converted from Judaism. So, he knows that the law was very important to them, and he knows that they wanted to follow it to the letter. So, he is trying to give them something. What is he trying to give them, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some people think that because he is writing to Jewish people who converted to faith...oh, Jesus is the Messiah that we were waiting for. Okay, good. But prior to that, all Judaism and ancient Israel was all about the law; keeping in the law; you've got to keep the law. It was drilled into them. Do good deeds. Follow the law, if you don't follow the law, God will punish you, and so forth and so on. So, could it be that some of these Jews heard this message of grace alone and said: Oh, we are so done with the law now. That was before we knew who Jesus was. So, now the law is gone. We don't even have to worry about it. And James is here saying: Well, actually, you do. You never would have gotten saved by keeping the law, even if you could do it perfectly, which you couldn't, but you never would have gotten save that way. But now that you are saved, the law is your guide—the law is what shows you what good living looks like. So, the law is still important. It didn't get you saved, but it is really important now that you are saved.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think he makes it clear in his book...James, that is. He says the law is our schoolmaster that teaches us what sin is. We would not have known what sin was but by the law. I think Paul also picks that up in his epistles. The goal is for us to live a certain way, not to earn our righteousness, but just like the *Heidelberg Catechism* teaches us, we learn about the guilt and the misery we have before us, and we get the salvation and the deliverance; and then, out of gratitude we get to live the law. Not that we are earning our righteousness, but out of the thankfulness of the completed work on the cross, we now live a new life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, James believes that if you are truly saved then you are transformed by that salvation, and Paul thinks that, too. So, we are going to hear a triplet of passages from Paul here, that shows that indeed, he and James are on the same page when it comes to what happens after you are saved by grace alone. Here is Colossians 3:5. Paul writes: Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature; sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these [things], the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, that is Paul in Colossians, and Paul is continuing on a note, even in an earlier letter that he wrote to the Thessalonians, in 1 Thessalonians 4, it says this: ³It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality, ⁴that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. ⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is: Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 4. A Christian person gets rid of all that stuff. You still follow the law so that you live good lives; and this is inevitable. This comes up in Romans 6, another passage here from Paul. Apparently, some in the early Church were taking Paul's message of grace and saying: Great; it doesn't matter what we do. So, let's live it up: Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow God forgives us again. God likes to forgive by grace, let's give him lots to forgive; and Paul responds to that: No, no, no, no; don't you know...Romans 6:

³Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ [Jesus] were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Paul knew just as much as James that faith without works is dead, and he makes that very clear. He may phrase it a little differently, but it is the same message: No disagreement ultimately between Paul and James.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love it how you did that there. You talked about James knowing that Abraham is saved by faith alone in God; and then you talked about here, where Paul knew that your works accompany your faith as a gratitude step after the finished work of the cross; and so, they are not in contradiction, because the Holy Spirit inspired both of them to write exactly what they wrote to the audiences to whom they were talking. So, I am glad that we are kind of getting closer to understanding there really is no contradiction.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and practically for us today, what does all this mean? Well, you know, Darrell, obviously it means the shape of our living as disciples has to be Christlike. You know, we cannot treat our Christian faith like a side hobby; something you do on the weekends, maybe, you know. No; faith is something that you take with you to work; it is something you take with you to school; it is something you take with you...your faith...with you to the mall...to the beach...to the movies; and Darrell, when our faith accompanies us to all those places, what it means is that we bear the fruit of the Spirit; which we are going to think about in the final program of this series when we get to Galatians. But we display the humility of Jesus; we serve others as Christ served us. In short, we do good works; and in this way, as James knew, we do display our righteousness before others.

DARRELL DELANEY

And we do that with the right spirit, not because we are earning any gold stars with God, but because we believe in him and we are grateful for what he has done for us, we live how he has called us to live. And the grace that saved us, changes us. We will talk more about that in the next episode. It is really simple, Scott; like if I believe that this chair is going to hold me up, I will show it by sitting in it. I could tell you that I believe the chair is going to hold me up, but if I don't sit in the chair, I am not actually demonstrating I believe that. So, that is what James is saying: Your works accompany your faith, and they demonstrate your faith and make it more complete in that way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Faith is the root; good deeds are the fruit. We mix those up pretty easily because you cannot see grace and you can see good deeds. So, we start to think: Well, what's the difference between me and my neighbor who doesn't go to church? I am a nicer person. I am more moral. That is like why God likes me. No; no, no; C. S. Lewis, in one of his great, crystal clear things, he said: God did not love us because we were good. God made us good because he loved us. That is one way by which we keep fruit and root clear. It is also how we avoid the Pharisee syndrome, you know. They only focused on their outward behavior. On the inside, they didn't think it mattered how they felt. Jesus says no; what is on the inside really matters a lot, and it needs to continue to matter to all of us.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a source of thanksgiving, and we can think about how God did this in the first place when he said in Ephesians 2: ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. In other words, when we look at our faith, we look at the righteous living that faith produces, this is the thing that makes us say what we always say at the end of every program: Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God, indeed. Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we conclude our series by examining mostly what Paul says about grace, faith, salvation, and works in the letter to the Galatians. We have a website: groundworkonline.com. Visit it and share what *Groundwork* means to you. You can even make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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