

## Faith and Works

by Hendrik Joubert

Faith and works are considered direct opposites by many; however this misconception results from a failure to recognize the difference between **works of the law**, i.e. works wherein one could **boast** as it requires perfection, and those spontaneous actions (works) which demonstrate faith in God and in what He says.

The failure to make the distinction causes many to believe that Paul and **James** holds contradictory positions on the issue; if one ignores the fact that Paul may very well be the author of the book of **Hebrews**, which includes one of the most compelling illustrations of the spontaneity of the works which demonstrate faith in God. **Chapter 11** has been referred to as the "*hall of faith*" – an apt description.

More importantly though, is the fact that as a result of this confusion many fail to demonstrate faith in God by submitting to graciously simple instructions whereby a sinner accesses the *grace* and the *love* of God – the very qualities of God used to justify this disobedience and un-*faith*-ful practices. Paul is (ab)used in order to justify this lack of faith.

**According to the wisdom given him (2Peter 3:16)**, which is another way of saying **inspired by God (2Timothy 3:16-17)**, the apostle Paul teaches much concerning the confusion on **the Law of the LORD given by Moses. (2Chronicles 34:14)** In **Galatians 3 verses 11 and 12** the straightforward contrast between the Law and faith is clearly drawn: **Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."** <sup>12</sup> **However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."**

Salvation has *always* been by faith; a fact vividly demonstrated in **Hebrews 11** as it reaches back all the way to Abel. From Paul's explanation in **Galatians 3:16** it seems that Israel believed that they were to be the source of blessing to all other nations. They were eager to point out that they were the seed of Abraham, even to the Messiah, the true Seed of the promise: **They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" (John 8:33)**

The Law, which they tried to bind upon believers in Christ (**Acts 15:5**), is somehow considered to *confirm* their *salvation*, and just what they considered that to be does not always seem clear if one considers the difference between *the faith* of the Pharisees and that of the Sadducees. From their physical view of the kingdom one suspects their beliefs were seated in the things of this world, causing them to miss the spiritual future for those who demonstrate their faith in God by their simple submission to Him and His word – as is the case also in our day.

The nature of law is just that, in order to live by it one has to keep it perfectly. Breaking any one of these results in condemnation. **For whoever keeps the**

**whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.** (James 2:10) One could not choose the laws to be accepted and rejected. (Galatians 5:3)

In **Galatians 3**, as also in **Romans 7**, Paul teaches us concerning the purpose for the Law. In **Galatians 3:19** he asks the following question on behalf of the (Jewish) audience: **Why the Law then?** and immediately supplies the answer: **It was added because of transgressions, ...** In the letter to the Romans the apostle explains the purpose for the law this way: **...I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."** (Romans 7:7) The tenth commandment. (Exodus 20:17)

From the law they were to learn that they have sinned and **fall short of the glory of God.** (Romans 3:23). In **Romans 7:24** the apostle voices the conclusion every Jew under the law should have reached: **O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?** The answer is given in the next verse: **I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord...** (Romans 7:25a) This describes the roll of the law being a tutor, or schoolmaster to lead them to Christ. (Galatians 3:24)

The amazing simplicity of salvation by faith is this, whatever we believe dictates our actions, or the lack thereof. **By**, or as a result of **faith**, the individuals listed in **Hebrews 11** acted in a specific way, *demonstrating* their faith. James describes it this way: **But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."** (James 2:18) And in Abraham's case: **You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;...** (James 2:22)

In **Exodus 17:6** Moses is instructed to **strike** the rock in order to obtain water, however towards the end of the wanderings he is commanded to **speak** to the rock. When he reverts back to the previous action by striking the rock God says: **"Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."** (Numbers 20:12)

Those who believe God and His word will do what He says, and thereby demonstrate respect for Him. Those who do not believe the actions described therein to be necessary will take it upon themselves to change the action, or the purpose for the action as described by God to disrespect Him in the sight of the world, in effect saying: *Shall we give you salvation?* The statement **...therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them...** will apply in a spiritual sense.