

From the time of Luther down to the present day, the positions which faith and works respectively occupy in the scheme of redemption have afforded a never-ending topic for theological controversy. The extreme to which Roman Catholics went in regard to good works being the only means of salvation, caused the Protestant reformers to fly to another extreme in affirming that salvation was the result of faith alone without works. That those who form part of the apostasy should mistake on this subject, as well as on others, is not to be wondered at, seeing that they are in such a state of darkness respecting the plan of salvation. But, it is somewhat surprising that any who have embraced the truth should have vague or erroneous views on this subject. In many cases, it arises from placing too much stress on one set of passages, and not giving due consideration to another series. Luther, the great apostle and father of Protestantism, in order to establish his dogma, rejected the epistle of James as spurious. And those who have learned their theology at his school have, practically, though perhaps not avowedly, done the same thing. Thinking that James and Paul contradict each other, and preferring the latter as an authority, they lay great emphasis on a few isolated passages in his epistles, and ignore the teaching of James. The apostle James was evidently a very practical man, if we may judge from the tenor of his epistle. In the first chapter, he points out that sin comes through yielding to the lust of the flesh, and introduces an exhortation on practical religion by saying: “Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only.” The second chapter is devoted to an argument against “respect to persons on account of their worldly position, &c. “which he enforced by asking a few pointed questions respecting faith and works. The third relates to the use of the tongue. The fourth inculcates various duties God and man. And the fifth, which begins with a denunciation against heaping-up corruptible treasure, consists mostly of an exhortation to practise patience and prayer.

It is in the second chapter that the apostle shews the intimate connection that exists between faith and works, He commences the argument by saying: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?”— (verse 14.) This is equivalent to saying that faith without works cannot save a man. The apostle, before answering the question, illustrates his meaning, first by a suppositious case, and second, by an historical fact, well known to all readers of Genesis. He says: “Supposing one professing to have faith, see a brother in want, but do nothing to supply

that brother’s want, what is the good of his faith?” He concludes that faith such as this, which is not accompanied by works, is “dead.” He then refers to Abraham, and asks whether the father of the Jewish nation was not “justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? “ Anyone familiar with the history of the Jewish patriarch will, at once, perceive the force of this question. Abraham had been promised that he and his seed should possess the land of Canaan; and that he should become the father of a great nation. It is obvious that this promise could not be fulfilled unless he had a son. He waited patiently a long time before there were any signs of this necessary preliminary coming to pass. At last his wife Sarah bore him a son, whom he called Isaac. This first, and only child gradually grew until he became a young man. At this stage, Abraham was sorely tried. He was commanded by God to offer up as a burnt offering the son on whom his future hopes were set. If he had been a man of weak faith, or his faith had been “dead” he would probably have reasoned somewhat in this way: “If I take the life of my only son before he becomes a parent, how can I be the father of a great nation, and how can I have any seed to share with me the promised inheritance? To kill my son will be equivalent to committing suicide; it will cut the link which is necessary to bring upon me the promised blessings.” But it does not appear that Abraham indulged in any such fleshly thoughts as these. He knew that the command to offer up his son came from the same God who had given him the promise. He staggered not at the promise through unbelief . . . being fully persuaded that what God had promised He was able also to perform.—(Rom. iv. 20, 21)—He would probably say to himself, “If God intends me to take away the life of my son, He will nevertheless, fulfill His promise; for He that gave him to me in the first instance, can also restore him to life.” The Apostle Paul intimates that this thought ran through Abraham’s mind, by saying that “the father of the faithful accounted that God was able to raise Isaac up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”— (Heb. ii. 19) — Thus Abraham, through having believed God’s promise, was enabled unhesitatingly to obey God’s command respecting Isaac. In the words of James: “faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect.”— (ch. ii. 22.)—This leads the Apostle to point out that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only,” (v. 24); which is equivalent to saying that faith without works is insufficient to bring salvation to any man.

The epistles to the Romans and the Galatians are thought to be opposed to such a conclusion as this; but a little consideration will show that they contain nothing inconsistent with it. On the contrary, they

afford evidence in support of it. It is quite true that the apostle says “A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. iii. 28), and that “a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ”—(Gal. ii.16.) But of what “works” is the apostle here speaking? The works pertaining to the gospel law of liberty? Certainly not. He means the works of the Mosaic law. He is writing to two ecclesias, in which there were Judaizing believers desirous of re-imposing else “yoke of bondage” abolished by Jesus Christ. He says nothing whatever against the works of which Jesus spoke when saying: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—(Matt. v. 16.)

Much misapprehension on this subject arises through not duly considering the meaning of certain words and phrases. It is forgotten that the inspired writers often use different language to teach the same thing. Hence, controversy respecting it is, in many cases, nothing more than a fight about words. The great point which should constantly be kept in mind in discussing this as well as any other topic is, What is the idea or truth conveyed by the words in dispute? Thus, although Paul, in writing to the ecclesias at Rome and in Galatia, does not use the same words as have been quoted from James’s epistle, is it to be supposed that he does not inculcate the same lesson? What was the lesson James desired to impress on the minds of his brethren? That obedience to God’s command was necessary to justify a man in His sight, and so bring salvation to him. Does Paul disregard this important truth? Notice what he says: God “will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in WELL DOING seek for glory, honour, and immortality, (He will render) eternal life.”—(Rom. ii. 6, 7.) And, in a subsequent verse, he says that God will render “glory, honour, and peace to every man that WORKETH GOOD, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.”—(verse 10.) What are “deeds” but good and bad works? And what are “well doing” and “worketh good” but other phrases for good works? How then can it be said that Paul does not teach the necessity of good works in order to obtain salvation?

In a subsequent chapter of the same epistle, Paul enters into a long argument to shew that Abraham became heir of the promised inheritance, not through the works of the Mosaic law, but “through the righteousness of faith.”—(ch. iv. 13)— The conclusion at which he arrives is, that all who would share the same inheritance, must manifest the same faith, and that none can realise it through the law of works which was enacted after the promise was given, and which had been abolished at the time he was writing. He then sums up the whole matter by

saying, respecting himself and all in a like position: “there-fore, *being justified by faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” -- (ch. v. 1) But, does he stop here? Does he teach that those who have been transformed from sinners to saints, by means of faith, have nothing further to do? The sixth chapter is wholly devoted to showing that those who have been “justified by faith” should henceforth cease to commit sin, and should bring forth righteousness. In their former condition, he calls them “servants of sin,” (v. 17,) but in their present position he denominates them “*Servants to God*,” (v. 22,) and says to them “neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but *yield yourselves unto God* as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as *instruments of righteousness unto God*.”-- (Verse 13) Does not the term “servants” indicate that those who occupy that relationship to God must work for Him? And does anyone doubt that that work must be good? In order that “servants of God” may yield themselves to Him, they must subject their will to His; which is another way of saying they must obey His commands. Paul affirms this in saying that they must become “instruments of righteousness;” for “righteousness” is but another term for obedience to God. And seeing that he says in his epistle to the Corinthians, that “the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God,” (I Cor. Vi. 9,) does it follow that those who have been “justified by faith,” but do not comply with the above injunctions, cannot be saved? If the unrighteous cannot inherit God’s kingdom, it follows that only the righteous can; and if righteousness means obedience to God, and obedience be the inspired definition of the works which, in conjunction with the “one faith,” are necessary to justification, what possible objection can there be to the statement that works are essential to salvation?

It is precisely the same as to say that obedience as well as faith is necessary, in order to obtain eternal life. And surely no one versed in the Scriptures will doubt or deny that obedience to God is one of the conditions for obtaining immortality, and an entrance into His kingdom. Jesus affirms it in his sermon on the mount, when saying, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, *but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven*”- (Matt. vii. 21); and again in the closing chapter of the Apocalypse: “*Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life*.”- (Rev. xxii. 14.) Thus, both the commencement and the termination of Jesus Christ’s teaching--at one time in the flesh, and the other in the spirit--enunciate this important truth. Following the examples of their master, the apostles John and Paul also teach it. The former says, “He that doeth the

will of God, abideth for ever”—(1 Jno. ii. 17), which is equivalent to saying, that he who doeth not God’s will, abideth not for ever. The latter apostle says, respecting Jesus Christ, that “he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”—(Heb. v. 9). Consequently, Jesus is not the author of salvation to those who do not obey him.

This being the teaching of Paul in one epistle, it is presumable that the same thing is to be found in his other writings. For it cannot be supposed that when writing to believing Jews and Gentiles, he would assert anything inconsistent with what he has written to believing Hebrews. Accordingly, we find him writing to the Romans, that God will render “indignation and wrath” to such as “do not OBEY the truth”—(Ch. ii. 8); and to the ecclesias of Galatia, he says, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not OBEY the truth?”—(Ch. iii. 1.) All those to whom these words were addressed, had believed the truth, and submitted to “the obedience of faith”—(Rom. xvi. 26), and hence, had been “justified by faith;” but some of them did not continue to “walk in the truth”—(Jno. iii. 3) as they ought to have done. They failed to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they had been called”—(Eph. iv. 4), and, as a consequence, were in danger of falling short of the gift of immortality. Hence, the sharpness with which the apostle rebukes the Galatians in the words already quoted. Before concluding the epistle, he solemnly warns them that their ultimate destiny will depend upon their own conduct: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for *whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.* For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting”—(Gal. vi. 7, 8.) To “sow to the flesh” is to “obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. vi. 12), or to bring forth “the works of the flesh.” To “sow to the Spirit” is to bring forth “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. v. 22), which is truth.—(1 John v. 6.) Therefore, a believer only sows to the spirit so long as he continues to obey the truth. The time when the reaping will take place is indicated by certain words addressed by Paul to the residents at Corinth, who had been “justified by faith.” Of himself and them he says “We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things in (or through) the body *according to that he hath done, WHETHER OR BAD.*”—(2 Cor. v. 10) What is the difference between doing that which is “good or bad” and bringing forth good or bad works? And if, at the judgment seat, everyone is to receive according to the good or bad things he has done, will not works affect the decision whether he is to receive blessing or punishment?

There need be no fear that an affirmative answer to this question will afford any room for boasting in the minds of those who receive good “things,” or that it will lessen their esteem for the author of their salvation. They will be ready to say, after having done all the things commanded them: “We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do”(Luke xvii. 10); and they will ascribe their “salvation to God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, saying to the Lamb “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue, and people, and nation.”—(Rev. v. 9.) The truth learned by them during their mortal life, that there is no salvation apart from the blood of God’s beloved Son, will then be more realised by them in its fullness. They know that, as children of Adam, they had done nothing which would entitle them to claim immortality from God, and that his offer to bestow it was all the result of his own free grace or favour. Animated by this thought, they reciprocated the love which God had manifested towards them while they were not sinners — (Rom. v. 8) The love of Christ constrained them to love him in return, by cheerfully obeying his commands; for this is the definition given by Jesus of love to himself and his Father: “*He that hath my commandments AND KEEPETH THEM, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father*”—(John xiv. 21). Such as attain to the position of “kings and priests,” having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb” (Rev. v. 10: vii 14), will not consist of those who have practically said, “what is the smallest possible amount of work I can do in order to satisfy my Master?” But of those who, like penitent Paul, have not only said “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” but who, on learning what was required of them, promptly went and did it. Although they will receive according to the good things done in their mortal bodies, nevertheless eternal life will be to them “the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans vi. 2, 3); for without him they could have had no chance whatever of obtaining it. The redeemed will consist of those who acted upon the words of Christ, “Without me ye can do nothing.”—(John xv. 5). The good works brought forth by them, were the result of the truth which was first devised by the Deity, and then planted in their minds by means of His word and the agencies put into operation by Him. They were practical manifestations of gratitude for favour received and blessings promised. The fact that eternal life was promised to them on certain conditions, will not in the slightest degree diminish its value as a gift. Their works occupied a similar relationship towards their faith end everlasting life, which the blossom of a tree bears towards its vitality and its fruit, but it is

essential to its production. So is it with works. They do not of themselves bring immortality; but they are necessary to its bestowal. The blossom is dependent upon the vitality of the tree. In like manner the good works of a believer are dependent upon his faith. If that faith be “weak” or “dead,” the works are very diminutive. But when it is strong and living, the works are abundant. As a matter of course this faith comprises a full conception of Jesus Christ’s mission, and is dependent upon it. The “one faith” cannot exist where there is ignorance of the “One Lord.” When, therefore, it is said that salvation is the result of faith and works, it is assumed that they are connected with, and dependent upon, the sacrificial and priestly functions of Jesus Christ.

As the “Judge of the quick and dead,” Jesus will examine his disciples, to see what kind of fruit they have brought forth. As High Priest, however, he will only present to his Father (2 Cor. iv 14) such as have produced “the fruit of the Spirit;” for it is part of his priestly functions — after the type of the Mosaic priesthood — before presenting anything to God, to ascertain whether it will be of such a character as will meet with the Deity’s approval. And, whatever is presented, the Father will accept on account of His beloved Son. Jesus having manifested perfect obedience, they will be covered with his righteousness. It is because they are unable to manifest such perfect obedience as he did that they need to be sheltered under his wings. God has mercifully provided for this deficiency by giving them a High Priest, who can feel for their infirmities, and who “maketh intercession for ‘them’ according to the will of God.”— (Romans viii. 27) Through him alone can they obtain forgiveness of their sins, of omission and commission. And their hope of future acceptance rests on two things — the intercessory power of their High Priest, and their own faithfulness to the truth. Care should be taken not to rely too much on either the one or the other. Thus, if anyone grounds his hope of salvation solely on the priesthood of Christ, there is a tendency to do that to which Paul referred, when he indignantly said, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.”— (Romans vi. 1, 2). And if anyone rely for future acceptance solely on his own doings, apart from the efficacy of Christ’s blood, as a means of forgiveness, he will in the end find that all his doings are of no avail, and that he is still an unwashed sinner. But, because the disciples of Christ cannot act up to his standard, is that any reason why they should not strive to attain as near to it as possible? There is a certain standard of righteousness to which they must rise, in order to derive any benefit from the righteousness of Christ. The testimony already adduced is sufficient to prove this. What the

precise standard is in each individual case, depends upon the talents and opportunities possessed by the respective members of “the one body” — some of whom are stronger, more honourable, and more useful than others. Whatever it be, it may safely be relied upon that no one will be measured by a standard to which he is unable to attain. Let each one strive to do his duty in the position in which God has placed him, endeavoring to keep “a conscience void of offence before God and man.” And for his shortcomings through the weakness of the flesh, let him ask forgiveness through the Divinely-appointed means. And then, although he will not have that self-confidence which manifests itself in presumption, neither will he have that kind of fear which produces anguish or torment. He who thus avoids these two extremes, will possess that inward peace of mind which the world cannot give, and which renders him calm amid all the trials of life, together with that humility which, in the sight of God, is of great price.

There are two passages in Paul’s Epistles, in addition to those already referred to, which are often quoted in opposition to what is here advanced. One states that “By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. ii. 8,9). It will be observed that “works” are not introduced here in opposition to “faith,” but in antithesis to “grace.” It is intended to refute the idea of those who are inclined to say that salvation is not a gift from God, but is a debt from Him, to which man has a perfect right in consequence of some works done by him. It was not man’s goodness which prompted the Almighty to open up a way of salvation: it was his fallen condition. For “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans iii, 23); and “There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.”— (Eccles. Vii. 20). However fruitful, therefore, anyone may be in “the fruit of the Spirit,” he has no room whatever for boasting; for had it not been that God in the first instance made known His will, he would not have known what was required of him, and would therefore have been unable to do that which is well pleasing to God.

The other passage states that “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.”— (Titus iii. 5). The key to this passage is to be found in the last clause, “the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” This carries us back to the day of Pentecost, when God sent His Spirit upon the Apostles, to lead them into the truth, and so enable them to make known to others the way of salvation, in the then new dispensation. Had not some such occurrence as this taken place, they would have been left in a state of

ignorance in regard to the “things concerning the name of Jesus Christ,” which had never before been preached. In that case the whole counsel of God would not have been communicated, and consequently no one would have been able to comply with the conditions now necessary to salvation. The Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit may, therefore, very appropriately be included among those things by which believers in the present dispensation are saved. It was not by any works of righteousness which had been done by either Jews or Gentiles that God was moved thus to provide means for their enlightenment. It was the result of his own free love.

If it be asked what are the works necessary in order to justify those who have embraced the “one faith,” the correct answer would be obedience to the commands given by Jesus and his Apostles. Of these the following may be taken as some of the principal ones: “Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude v. 3); “Love not the world” (1 John ii. 15); “Love one another” (1 Peter i. 22); “Lie not one to another” (Coloss. iii. 9); “Bear ye one another’s burdens” (Gal. vi. 2); “Distribute to the necessity of the saints” (Rorn. xii. 13); “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. v. 17); “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (v. 22); “Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. x. 25); “Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly” (2 Thess, iii. 6); “Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them” (Rorn. xvi. 17); “Fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness; let it not be once named among you as becometh saints, neither filthiness nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient” (Eph. v. 3); “Add to your faith virtue (or courage); and to virtue (or courage) knowledge; and, to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to kindness, charity” (2 Peter iii. 5, 7); “Do this in remembrance of me — Jesus — (1 Cor. xi. 24); &c.

To all who have become brethren of Christ, it may be said in the words of the Elder Brother, “If ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them”— (John xiii. 17). J. J. A.