Let’s grow together in the knowledge of God’s Word.

When we read the Bible, especially Romans 4 and James 2, we encounter what seems to be a contradiction. Paul emphasizes that a person is justified *by faith* and *not by works*, while James says a person is justified *not by faith alone*, but *also by works*.

So, is the Bible contradicting itself? Or is it our understanding that needs correction?

Let’s study both passages carefully.

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1. Paul in Romans 4: Justification is by Faith, Not by Works of the Law

> *Romans 4:1–6 (ESV)*
> *“What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?*
> *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 counted to him as righteousness.”
> *Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.*

> *And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.”*

Here, Paul is clearly addressing “works of the Law” that is, obedience to commandments, rituals, or moral efforts as a basis for righteousness before God. Paul says that no one can claim righteousness or favor before God by doing good deeds or keeping the Law, because:

> *Romans 3:23 (ESV)*
> *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

Similarly, Psalm 14 affirms the universal sinfulness of humanity:

> *Psalm 14:2–3 (ESV)*
> *“The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man,*
> *to see if there are any who understand,*
> *who seek after God.*

> *They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;*
> *there is none who does good,*
> *not even one.”*

Paul’s conclusion is that righteousness before God is a gift, received through faith in Jesus Christ, not something earned by being morally good or religious.

> *Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)*
> *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*
> *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

So even though someone might say, “I’m not a thief, not an adulterer, not a drunkard,” that’s not enough to earn salvation. Only one person fulfilled the Law perfectly Jesus Christ. The rest of humanity, from Adam to the last human who will ever live, has fallen short.

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2. James in James 2: Faith Without Works Is Dead

Now let’s consider James 2:21–26:

> *James 2:21–24 (ESV)*
> *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?*
> *You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;*
> *and the Scripture was fulfilled that says,* “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”*and he was called a friend of God.*
> *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*

At first glance, James appears to contradict Paul. But the context is key.

Paul talks about *works of the Law* (keeping commandments to earn righteousness), while James talks about *works that come from genuine faith*. These are not the same.

What Are “Works of Faith”?

James gives examples Abraham offering Isaac, and Rahab hiding the spies (James 2:25). These were not ritualistic or moral commandments, but actions flowing from their trust in God.

> *James 2:26 (ESV)*
> *“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”*

Just like Abraham trusted God enough to sacrifice Isaac, we demonstrate real faith when we act based on God’s promises.

Illustration: Faith in Action Today

Imagine someone is diagnosed with diabetes and told not to eat sugary or starchy food. But this person believes the Word of God in:

> *Matthew 8:17 (ESV)*
> *“He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.”*

He believes he is healed by Jesus’ sacrifice, and begins to live like a healthy person eating freely, walking confidently. That act of living out his healing, based on his faith in God’s Word, is a modern example of “works of faith.”

His healing doesn’t come because he is morally good (not a thief, adulterer, etc.) but because he acted on God’s promise in faith. That’s what James is talking about.

Two Kinds of Works

Type of Works	Described By	Basis of Righteousness?	Result
Works of the Law	Paul (Romans)	No	Condemnation
Works Produced by Faith	James (James)	Yes (evidence of faith)	Justification

So we can say:

- We are justified before God by faith alone (Romans 4).
- But genuine faith must express itself in action (James 2).

This is why Paul also says:

> *Galatians 5:6 (ESV)*
> *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”*

And again:

> *Hebrews 10:38 (ESV)*
> *“But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”*

Why Good Deeds (Moral or Religious) Aren’t Enough

Even if someone is kind, generous, and upright giving to the poor, avoiding sin that doesn’t mean they’re saved. Many people of other religions do good deeds, but without faith in Jesus Christ, those deeds don’t result in salvation.

> *John 14:6 (ESV)*
> *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”*

Salvation is not earned, it is received through faith in Jesus, and then *genuine faith produces holy living*.

> *Galatians 2:16 (ESV)*
> *“...a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ...”*

Final Words: Faith Is the Key

- We are forgiven by faith.
- We are healed by faith.
- Our prayers are answered through faith.
- We receive every spiritual blessing through faith in Jesus and His Word.

That’s why the enemy (Satan) attacks our faith, not just our

behavior. He wants us to believe that we must “earn” God’s love by keeping rules, rather than trusting fully in the finished work of Christ.

We are not justified by our good behavior or moral superiority. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and that faith, when it is alive and true, will always produce action, or what James calls *works of faith*. Those are the fruits of salvation, not the cause of it.

May the Lord bless you richly as you continue to walk by faith and not by sight.

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