



The Texas Capitol Devotional

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. James 2.21-24

What Kind of Work Do You Do?

We often ask a new acquaintance, "What kind of work do you do?" The verses above raise a question about the nature and motivation of our "work." Not our vocation, but our actions. Not what we do for a living, but what kind of life we live. It may be valid to speak of vocation by saying, "it is what I do, but not who I am." But you could not rightly say regarding your actions, "those are just the things I do, but they are not who I am." Actions reveal our will, character, thoughts, and feelings. They prove who we are.

The reformer, Martin Luther, stumbled at the words of James we read here. Luther's emphasis upon salvation through faith alone caused him to miss James' point here entirely. James was not writing about the means of our salvation, but its effects. James confronts an unnamed opponent attacking the false notion that faith and works can be separate. To illustrate his point, he marshals two Biblical examples before his readers—Abraham and Rahab. The idea that you can have faith without the evidence of works is inconceivable to James.

Above James writes of good works which flow from genuine faith. In contrast, works of the law carried out in the flesh are what result when we believe that we can justify ourselves before God. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Works that flow from faith, that is, our trust in and obedience to God, please Him. Faith that prompts such work is accounted to us for righteousness. Faith also brings us into a relationship with God characterized as friendship.

The word rendered in these verses as "justified" carries two meanings in the writings of the New Testament. Paul most often used the word in reference to our salvation by faith in Christ. The believer is declared righteous before God by virtue of his faith in the finished work of Christ. James uses the word to mean vindicated or proven before men to be righteous. Paul's emphasis was upon Abraham's justification before God by virtue of his faith, whereas, James emphasizes Abraham's faith being vindicated or proven before men by virtue of his offering of Isaac, his son, upon the altar.

So, what kind of work do you do? Not your vocation, but what kind of life do you live? What do your actions say about who you really are? Do your works originate in self-will? Are they carried out in self-effort? Are they aimed at self-promotion? Are they the dead works of the law? On the



other hand, do they originate in faith? Are they carried out in the power of the Spirit? Are they aimed at promoting Christ?

Living a whole or undivided life is an indispensable characteristic of the Christian life. This is why James makes it a major theme of this letter. Are your actions consistent with the faith you profess? May God do whatever necessary in our lives so that we can answer that question with a resounding YES!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Garner".

Don Garner
State Director, Texas