***Justification before Men
RO153-01***

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Please open your Bibles today to Romans 12:3-8, as we begin a new section. Our subject is "Service in the Body," and this is segment number one.

As we have indicated, the apostle Paul has completed his doctrinal portion of the book of Romans. And now, beginning with chapter 12, he is dealing with application to living the Christian life. He, therefore, calls upon Christians to offer their physical bodies to God for His use. He says, "This is a rational use." God only works, and accomplishes, His business through the physical body of believers. He, furthermore, exhorts the Christians not to live after the external pattern of Satan's world system. Instead, he directs the believer to be totally transformed internally by the renewal of his mind with a divine viewpoint of Bible doctrine.

The first 2 verses of Romans 12, which we have studied, are among the most important that you'll find anywhere in the Bible. Therein lies the key to making all the difference, not only in your Christian life now, but in what kind of an eternity you will enjoy in heaven. The divine viewpoint mentality, which will be achieved through the intake of the knowledge of the Word of God will enable the believer to find the will of God which will then prove to be good and pleasing to God, and perfect.

A Christian renews his mind from the natural human viewpoint with which he enters the Christian life. He replaces that with divine viewpoint by the use of the grace system of perspective, which we have studied now in detail. This basically included instruction in Bible doctrine within the context of a local church service with the spiritual gift of the pastor-teacher enabling the believer to store God's viewpoint in his human spirit. God the Holy Spirit uses the truth which is learned to guide the mind in divine control of the emotions and the will. The result is a stable person who is producing divine good works for which he will be rewarded in heaven.

The standard of normalcy, we have pointed out, in all that we deal with as Christians, and against which we are to judge ourselves, is the image of Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:2 points out: "Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, fir we shall see Him as He is."

Now, while we are going step by step toward that sanctification – that setting apart into the image of Jesus Christ, the time is going to come when the job will be done. That is the ultimate objective of the Christian life – that we be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. This is what Christian service is all about. In every area and every agency of our ministry, that is our objective. We have various means (various vehicles), whether it's in the academy, or in the youth clubs, or the tapes, or the church ministries, the bottom line is transforming people into the image of Christ. This produces the soldiers that God can use in doing His work.

**The Sensual Person**

A Christian then, Paul has indicated, may live, in fact, on three different levels of existence. The first is the sensual. The sensual level is the level beyond which many Christians do not ever rise. This is the person who is dominated by his five physical senses. This person reflects his extreme preoccupation with the sensual, with certain kinds of expressions, such as: he is conscious of the fact that it hurts, dealing with the sense of feeling; it stinks, dealing with the sense of smell; it is too loud, dealing with the sense of hearing; it tastes bad – the sense of taste; or, it looks ugly – the sense of sight. His preoccupation is reflected by what controls him. If it's too cold, he can't go to church. If it's too hot, he can't go to church. If it's just right, it's a shame to go to church. He's very sensitive, through his senses, as to what is going on around about him. These sensual reactions in themselves, of course, are not necessarily evil, but some Christians are primarily motivated by them, and they live basically to satisfy them. Thus, they only do what pleases their senses, and their Christian service is affected accordingly.

The sensual level of life is the lowest that there is. It is what the Bible refers to as the level of the natural man; that is, the unsaved man 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned, and this man has no connection with what is spiritual. He is only on the sensual level.

**The Soulish Person**

But some Christians do a little better. They rise above the sensual, and they go to the soulish level of existence. The soulish person is dominated by his mind; his emotions; and, his will. The soul in this Christian is controlled by the old sin nature. The old sin nature has strong qualities and it has weak qualities. From the strong factor of the old sin nature comes human good works. This makes a person appear to be a very fine Christian. This is why unbelievers can come off looking just as good as Christians in what they do, because the sin nature can make you look very good and very virtuous. It's admirable in every respect. In the kind of a person who is a soulish man or woman, the mind is devoted often to the study of the Bible that it produces an expert on Scripture and he's viewed as godly. His emotions flow very freely from tears to ecstatics, and he's easily swayed by his emotions. And all of the manipulators in the religious realm that are on television love to deal with the soulish Christian, because he can get at those emotions, and he can prosper by them.

Then there is the will in the soulish man and woman. The will is very strong. They will have nothing to do with vices, and they are uncompromising in their decisions. The overall appearance is something of an exemplary human being. However, the soul here, while controlling the senses, is itself controlled by the sin nature so that there is basically no difference between the soulish Christian and the unbeliever. As a matter of fact, the Bible very clearly calls the soulish Christians a carnal person. He operates on a very fleshly level.

1 Corinthians 3:3 refers to him when it says, "For you are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?" And those words that you read there reflect emotions, and wills, and even concern for biblical things.

**The Spiritual Person**

The highest level, and this is what the apostle Paul is shooting for, is the spiritual. The spiritual person is controlled by God the Holy Spirit. This is never true of an unbeliever, and it is not true of the carnal Christian. The spiritual Christian is spiritual because he is yielded to God the Holy Spirit. And the way you yield to God the Holy Spirit is not by psyching yourself in some way, but by confessing known sins, and correcting your ways according to Scripture. Here is where the doctrine that you have learned, which has been stored in your human spirit, now flows freely to your mind, as we showed you last time, so that your mentality is oriented to God's thinking to guide your emotions and to guide your will in the use of the body. And that's what Paul is talking about – giving your body to God's service, and how to control it effectively in that service. The physical senses and the soul are, in the spiritual Christian, directed by God the Holy Spirit, and that produces godly living. We call that experiential sanctification.

Well, what this does is create a person who is capable of producing divine good works, and thereby earning rewards for his eternal pleasure in heaven. This godly lifestyle of divine good works cannot be reproduced by unbelievers, no matter how idealistic; dedicated; and, self-sacrificing they are. All efforts by unbelievers are human good. They come from the sin nature, and they are doomed to hurt people – not to help, no matter how good it may appear, and how good the intentions may be. The Holy Spirit does not teach Bible doctrine divine viewpoint truth to unbelievers. He only teaches them one truth, and that is the doctrine of salvation. The Holy Spirit does come in, and He makes clear the doctrine of salvation, but that's the only thing that He gives to the unbelievers. To the carnal Christian, He gives nothing. While he is in carnality (out of temporal fellowship), he's cut off.

The spiritual is, indeed, the highest level of life for the Christian, and this is indicated in 1 Corinthians 2:15 Paul says, "But he that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." The spiritual Christian has God's perspective. He is in touch with reality. He knows what's going on. He can pass proper judgments. And people who are not spiritual are not in a position to be able to evaluate him or judge him. That's why the spiritual man sometimes may appear to be arrogant and cocky, because he is not easily swayed or subject to the manipulations of all the carnal gang and the Christian community, or all the unbelievers. He knows where he stands because he is in touch with the Word of God, and in guidance under the Spirit of God.

**Earning Rewards in Heaven**

Now, Romans 12:3-8 are going to get into the subject of serving God through your spiritual gifts, which is a crucial, enormously important thing. I'm amused so regularly, when I say to people: "The bottom line of the Christian life is earning rewards in heaven," and they look at you a little bit, and they're a little startled. I said that to some seminary students at the Dallas Seminary book room this week, and I could just see in their minds a flash of: "That's awful; that's gross; that's low; and that's self-serving." But the truth of the matter is that the Lord Jesus Christ said: "Stole your treasures in heaven, smart folks. Devote yourself not to the things of this world, which are going to flitter off and be wasted by somebody that you leave it to after you die. The most important thing is to earn eternal rewards, because if you as a Christian are earning rewards through the exercise of your spiritual gifts, then God's work is being done on earth. That indeed is the bottom line of the Christian life – for God's work to be done. But you cannot do it if you are not earning rewards in heaven in the process.

**Eternity will not be the Same for Every Believer**

Now, that takes a lot of faith in God. And before we get into this, I want to direct you to James 2:14-26, which has some very significant things to say about faith and the Christian's works. And we're going to briefly look over these verses.

**James 2:26**

James is presenting instruction here to establish the bottom line conclusion, which is in verse 26. So, let's look at verse 26 first, to see where he's going, so that we'll get a little bit of an idea of his line of argument, because he tells us something that is of enormous importance in the Christian life in serving. Now, some of you have a hard time, as always, taking seriously that you're going to check out of this life sooner or later. It's all going to be over, and then it's going to be eternity, but it's not going to be the same eternity for every believer. For some of you, eternity is going to be greatly enriched, but some of you are going to be candidates for the poverty program, because of what you did with your life. That's the whole point of the Judgment Seat of Christ. That's the whole point of evaluating your personal works. That's the whole point of what you did with your life. Some of you are enjoying the very wonderful life now, and that's the extent of what you have. You're on the sensual level, or maybe you're on the soulish level.

So, my advice to you is: "Have a good time," because after you check out, there's not going to be much to look back upon. James here is trying to explain that it is a problem of your personal faith that causes you to be that slovenly and that careless. In James 2:26, he says, “For as the body (the physical body) without the spirit is dead, so, faith without works is dead also." He is saying that the body minus the spirit is dead. We can all understand that. A person is dead when his spirit and soul leaves the body. But he says, "In the same way, your faith." And I tell you now that this is your faith as a Christian: "Your faith as a Christian minus divine good works is dead." A Christian without good works ends up with a dead faith. As the living human body can die, so too can the living faith in a Christian die. And Christians need to take that a lot more seriously than they generally do. Your faith, that brought you into eternal life, can become a dead faith.

"As the spirit gives vitality to the human body, so, divine good works give vitality to your faith as a believer. The principle of divine good works (keeping faith alive) is being applied by James to Christians here. I call to your attention the fact of the context. In James 2:14, that begins this section, he says, "What does it profit my brethren?" Now, to whom is he speaking if he calls them "brethren?" He is obviously speaking to Christians. So verse 26 applies to Christians.

In James 2:1, he addresses Christians, and he tells them to hold their faith in Jesus Christ without partiality among people: "My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, with respect to persons." People who hold faith in Jesus Christ – these are Christians he's talking about. In James 1:16-18, he indicates that people who are born again are born again from above. So, he is addressing these people who are Christians.

At this point. James is not speaking about faith, however, in terms of trusting in Jesus Christ for justification. Because he is speaking to Christians, he's talking about a different kind of faith and a different kind of consequence. The faith that has brought you into eternal life is already assumed, and therefore, he calls them "brethren, and he speaks to them as Christians. So, he is not saying that good works keep your saving faith alive so that you won't lose your salvation. To lose your salvation would obviously contradict all the rest of the book of Romans. So, we're not even going to delve into that. That is a self-evident fact. We have firmly established that previously. But there is a faith that you can lose, which, while it will not lose your salvation, it will lose your capacity for good works service, and for earning eternal rewards. James, in fact, is not saying here that your good works in God's service prove that you're born again. It doesn't prove that. What proves that you're born again is Who you have trusted in for eternal life. And, as Paul said, he knows in Whom he has believed. Therefore, he is confident that the Christ in Whom He has trusted will keep the issue of his eternal destiny without any problem.

James is saying that a Christian's post-justification faith in God is kept active and strong in a certain way, and that is by performing divine good works. The lack of good works results in the Christian's faith deteriorating into a dead orthodoxy, and into a useless life. And that's unfortunately what often happens to Christians. They learn a lot about the Word of God, but they never are engaged in Christian service. They have spiritual gifts. Everybody has at least one, but they don't even know what it is, and they don't use it, and they really don't care. They are simply muddling through life. And the cost in eternity will be enormous. That is the thing that concerns James – to alert people that they should not, as Christians, waste their lives. Divine good works performed through the use of your spiritual gift, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is what he's talking about. The loss of faith in the Christian through the lack of doing good works does not result in the loss of your eternal salvation, but of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

So, the question, in James 2:14 is this: "What does it profit, my brethren, a Christian man to say that he has faith, and has not works? Can faith save him?" Now, in the Greek language, this question has the negative particle "me." When that happens in the Greek Bible, that tells us what the answer should be to the question. And the answer, therefore, to this question is a resounding "No – negative." The way we really translate this is: "Faith can't save him, can it?" That's what the Greek says. And the answer implied is "No." Isn't that amazing? “What does it profit, brethren, though person say he has faith, and he does not have any works with that faith? Can faith save him?" The answer is "No."

Some have foolishly (without understanding the full line of James' argument here, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) presumed that what this verse is saying is that if you don't have good works, along with your trust in Christ the Savior, you will not go to heaven. But on the basis of interpreting Scripture with Scripture, it is clear that James is speaking about a different kind of salvation than saving a person from hell. We already know that Ephesians 2:8-9 tell us that the salvation that takes you into heaven is on the basis of an act of God's grace, as a result of your faith in Christ. We know that that's true. Therefore, we know that James is not saying here that you have some kind of works that will either save you or keep you saved. But he is very definitely saying that there is a faith that's going to save you.

**"Saved"**

So, the question is: what does he mean by faith; and, what kind of salvation is he talking about? There are different meanings to the word "save." It's the Greek word "sozo." And this word is used in the Bible in a variety of ways. For example, in Matthew 9:22, it speaks of physical healing as saving a person.

In Matthew 8:25, it talks about rescuing from physical death. The disciples were in the boat; the storm has come up; they call upon Jesus; and, they say, "Save us." What are they saying? "Sozo – Lord, save us." What do they mean? They're asking Him to save them from drowning, and from dying.

In Acts 16:31, the word "saved" is used in terms of preservation from judgment in hell – the way we normally think about the word "saved."

In Romans 5:10, it's talking about being preserved from being under the domination of your sin nature.

In Romans 5:9, the word "saved" is used in terms of a Christian being preserved from entering the tribulation era.

In Mark 13:13, the word "saved" is used in terms of being kept alive through all the terror and the plagues and the suffering of the tribulation, and going alive into the millennium. Mark 13:13 has been a favorite ground of those who say, "You can lose your salvation, because it says that those who continue faithful to the end will be saved." And that's why some people often will end their prayers in a certain way. Because they do not understand the principle of salvation, they will end their prayers, thinking to honor God, and they'll say, "Oh, Lord, save us in the end." I always thought that was a bad choice of words to begin with, as well as bad doctrine. But the point is that God is not going to cause you here to be lost or saved. What Mark 13:13 is talking about is surviving alive through the tribulation. If you do that, you'll be preserved to go into the millennium.

Then we have one more. In 1 Corinthians 3:15, it talks about a Christian going to heaven in spite of the loss of rewards – a Christian saved to go to heaven, in spite of the fact that he's going to go there, poor of any rewards.

**The Sin unto Death**

So, the word "saved" is used in different ways here in the Bible. Therefore, at the end of verse 14, we have to question how he means this word to be used. In James 5:19-20, we have the expression "Save a soul from death:" "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Here, the word "saved" is being used in terms of physical death: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth." If some Christian in your congregation gets way out in left field, and way off-base morally, or in terms of the Word of God, and he will respond to your guidance, and you'll be able to restore him, you will actually save him from physical death possibly, because as 1 John 5 points out, there is a sin that is a sin unto death. It's going too far. And every now and then, you get the shock of your life to see that somebody dies who shouldn't die. And that is no indication as to why, but sometimes when that happens, it is because there is a problem in their life such that God finally says, "There's no use letting you live on this earth anymore. I cannot use you. You can never store another treasure in heaven. You cannot do any good work. Your faith, because you have lacked works, has now gone to the place of death." Your faith and confidence in God is zilch. So, God says, "Let's just get you out of the way and take you to heaven." And He takes the life, and He takes that person to heaven.

**Sin Leads to Death**

James says, "If you can change his mind, it's worth the effort, because if you change his mind, you'll save his capacity; his faith will begin to be restored; his confidence in God will grow; and, as your confidence in God grows, your service grows. The people who do not have confidence and faith in God are the people who do not serve God. So, James here is using the word "saved" in terms of physical life. James 1:21 actually says, "Wherefore, put away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save your souls." And the word "souls" there is better translated as "life," because that's what he's talking about. It will put away sin, because as James has already pointed out earlier, sin leads to death.

So, he says, "Get away from sin, and get back to the Word of God, and it will save your life. He is dealing with a person's physical life – not with eternity. You don't get to heaven because you stop sinning. The whole context of James 1:13-15 talks about physical death as a consequence of sin. James 1:21 simply points out that the antidote to physical death from sin is doctrine in the soul, upon which you begin living.

So, James 2:14-26 is talking about temporal life. It is not talking about your eternal life or how to keep it. Now, once you understand that it is talking about temporal life, here we have an enormously important bit of direction, so that when we go back to Romans 12 and deal with the spiritual gifts, you'll have a new perspective of its importance. A fact in demonstrated in the context of James 2:15-17, which deal with preserving a person's life by supplying his necessities. In James 2:15-17, he says, "If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them: 'Depart in peace. Be warmed and filled,' and notwithstanding, you don't give them those things which are needful to the body. What does it profit? Even so, faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone."

Now, what he is saying here is that here is the illustration: a person has some necessities of life. If he doesn't have them, he's going to die. So, he says, "What good does it do for you to be nice to him, and to speak kindly to him, if you don't give him what he needs in order to physically survive?"

So, in the same way, verse 17 says, "A faith, which is not given what it needs, will die in the Christian." Faith without divine good works will die in you, because that's what it means to stay alive – not to get you saved, and not to keep you saved, but to keep you functioning as a Christian, in terms of God's service and your rewards. Saving one's faith saves one's life in terms of making it count for eternal reward. That is the problem for all of us as Christians – not wasting your life: the potential that God has given you. The issue is not your destiny to heaven or hell. The issue is what you'll have when you get to heaven. A dead faith in the Christian is one which is inactive in Christian service. It is functionally dead. You don't move. You never move in Christian service. You don't care to move. It's a relative. Furthermore, it's a weak thing because, as we will get into later, you move in a very slovenly way in your Christian service.

In James 2:18-19, James brings up an imaginary objector. This objector raises a question about the relationship between faith and works. He challenges what James is saying: How can faith die because it doesn't have works? Do good works keep faith alive? "Yea, a man may say, 'You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I'll show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well, but demons also believe and tremble.'" This man says, "How can my works affect my faith? I believe in God, and I believe He's One God, and I believe He's up there. I believe all those good things." And James says, "Yeah, that's good. So, do the demons, and it causes them to vibrate with fear. It doesn't mean a thing.

**Faith without Works is Dead**

So, we come to the proof of James' principle. If you do not exercise your faith as a Christian in divine good service, your faith will wither, and it will die. In James 2:20, James begins by asking the objector if he wants evidence that faith of a Christian dies without good works. So, he says, "But will you know, O, vain man, that faith without works is dead?" And you just see James here pulling a little Jackie Gleason: "Is that what you want to know? Do you want to know if your faith is going to die? Is that what you want to know? Good, I'm glad you asked. Is that what you want to know? OK, I'm going to tell you." And James is just building up here, and the fella is saying, "Yeah, that's what I want to know."

**Abraham**

So, James jumps in, in verse 21, with two very powerful examples. First of all, he gives the example of Abraham. It is clear from the Word of God that Abraham was justified before God by faith in a promised Savior which was to come. Genesis 15:6 make that very clear. Abraham believed God's promise of a coming Savior, and Abraham was declared a righteous man. He had absolute righteousness, and therefore he was justified. Therefore, Abraham is a born-again person. He was justified before God by faith in that Savior, which was to come. "But was not Abraham, our father, justified by works." Abraham was also justified (or "vindicated" is another good word for "justified." Abraham was also vindicated before men, this time by a certain specific good work; namely, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar.

So, the incident of God calling upon Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac is used as a demonstration of where a person's work reinforces; vitalizes; and, strengthens his faith, which, if the person does not do, faith will be weakened; faith will be deteriorated; and, in fact, that faith ultimately will die. You must remember that Abraham had a tremendous promise from God. God said, "I'm going to make you a great nation – so great that all the nations on the face of the earth will eventually look to your nation, and will call you blessed, and you will be the source of blessing to all of them. And I'm going to do this by giving the nations of the world a Savior to cover their sins. And I'm going to bring this Savior through your line of descendants – specifically, through your son Isaac." So, here's a great promise, along with many other things. And Abraham rejoices.

Suddenly, God says, "I want you to cut off the key feature of that promise. What I'm going to do for you has to come through your son Isaac, or I don't do it. I want you to kill him. I want you to sacrifice him to Me." Now, if you don't think that takes a strain on your faith, you're not thinking. What kind of faith is this? How is Abraham going to respond? Is Abraham now going to have to say, "God, just a minute? That's not logical. That's not sensible. If You kill this boy, you can't do what You said." But Abraham was a man of doctrine. He knew the essence and the character of God, and therefore, the character of God came to his assistance. He knew the justice of God, and he knew the omnipotence of God.

So, Abraham's faith was, in fact, strengthened and matured by his response to this command to kill Isaac as a sacrifice. Notice James 2:22: "See how faith wrought with his words, and by works was faith made perfect." Abraham's faith was matured; it was deepened; and, it was strengthened as the result of his work of obedience to God's command. Abraham's faith in the future Savior Jesus Christ had already produced his justification unto eternal life. That's reiterated in verse 23: "The Scripture was fulfilled, which said Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. And he was called 'a friend of God.'" Abraham's willingness to obey God in sacrificing Isaac plays, obviously, a maximum demand upon his faith – that original faith in God which brought him his justification, and his salvation to eternal life. Abraham's faith pressed his confidence in God to the limit. And that limit was that God was going to be faithful to what He had promised.

The Bible tells us the line of reasoning that Abraham followed. In Romans 4:17-21, Paul observes: "As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations (referring to Abraham) before Him, Whom he believed, even God, Who gives life to the dead, and calls those things which are not as though they were; who, against hope, believed in hope, that he might become the Father of many nations, according to which was spoken: 'So shall your seed be.'" And what he is referring to is the fact that Abraham was sexually dead, and it was impossible for him to have children. And yet Abraham said, I'm going to make it. God's going to give me this son. And, being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body, now dead, when he was about 100 years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform." Abraham's reaction was that God is able to do it. He will keep His word. And when Abraham responded by tying the boy up, and getting ready to sacrifice him, the faith that he had in God was made even stronger, and deepened, and matured.

Notice also, along with this, Hebrews 11:17-19: "By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac shall your seed be called, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from which also he received him in a figure." Abraham's faith was strengthened by his obedience. And Abraham's faith was vindicated, because Abraham, in his mind, said, "God is going to let me kill the boy, and then he's going to raise him back to life. But God is going to bring the nation through this child." Abraham's faith was increased and vitalized because of his willingness to do this work of obedience.

So, faith exercised, as a work of obedience to God, has in turn enriched and strengthened Abraham's faith. Now, if Abraham had backed off, and his faith refused to do this good work, the result would have been that he would have become less confident in God. His faith would have been weakened. He would have been uncertain about casting himself upon God. This would have been a very serious thing for him had he refused to do this.

This principle applies to the post-justification faith of every one of us today. Faith in Jesus Christ as Savior has resulted in our justification. We do possess absolute righteousness. Now that saving face is either nurtured, or you let it wither on the vine. That faith is nurtured and increased by using your spiritual gifts in God's divine good service. If you refuse to engage in Christian service, this results in a weakening and a dying of your confidence in God. And that is a very serious matter. If all of your life is on a sensual level, you can see what your problem is. If all of your life is on the soulish level, you have a very serious problem. It is the spiritual Christian that is in touch with reality, and if you want to live on a sensual level, and if you want to live on the level of the soul, that's fine. That's what marvels of grace permit us to do. And it is your privilege to blow it. But if you want something better for all eternity, God, in this passage, is reminding us, through the example of Abraham, that this man, who had a faith in God, did not let it die. He acted upon it with a work that increased and made him more powerful as an individual. If you refuse to engage in Christian service, and if you refuse to use your spiritual gifts, your faith is weakened, and your soul becomes hard toward God.

Ephesians 4:18, I remind you, the last phrase, "the hardness of their heart (the hardness of the mind, representing the soul), having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the hardness of the soul." On the facets of the soul (the mind; the emotions; and, the will) comes a hardness toward God. And we have studied the consequences of that in detail. That's what we're talking about here.

So, this degeneration of faith through lack of works does not affect your personal salvation toward heaven. But it does affect your continuing with faith in God, and the exercise of your works. James concludes, from Abraham's experience, that the value of a believer's life unto eternal rewards is preserved by divine good works, and not just by saving faith.

James 2:24 says, "You see than that, by works, a man is justified (or vindicated), and not by faith alone." It isn't just his faith, but it is his works that vindicate and that result in all the things that God has promised to him.

**Rahab**

He uses one other illustration. In verse 25, he turns to the Old Testament again, to Rahab, the harlot in Jericho who trusted in God for Salvation by His grace. Rahab, you remember, was willing to disobey the king's commandment. And when the spies had come to reconnoiter the condition of Jericho, prior to the invasion attempt on the part of the Jews, she hid them, and pointed in the wrong direction to the king's men. So, she sent them on a wild goose chase. Then she hastened to help the men to escape. This was a tremendous good work on the part of this woman who was now saved. It was exercising her faith in God. And, here again, her faith was justified, not in the sense unto salvation, but it is vindicated that she would trust God in this way, by the fact that when the walls of Jericho fell, everybody around was killed. But when the soldiers came, and they saw that home in which was gathered Rahab and her household, and outside the window was the scarlet thread (the scarlet cord), they said: "That home is safe. Nobody dies in that home." And they bypassed it. Throughout the rest of Jericho, there was nothing but that. So, this woman's faith not only was strengthened herself, but it preserved physical life. That's what your faith does. When your faith in God is really strong, then you obey Scripture; then you obey dietary laws; and, then you obey all the things that maximize your physical well-being. And it enhances the soul (your psychological well-being).

**Justification before Men**

James does not teach here justification to eternal life by faith plus works. He speaks here only of justification by works on one side, or justification by faith on the other side. So, James 2:24 implies that justification by faith is not the only kind of justification there is. There's also this justification by works. However, Romans 4:2 says that, before God, we are not justified by works. This justification is before men. When Abraham sacrificed Isaac, his faith was vindicated in the eyes of people. And that is why they called him the friend of God. They said, "This man is really on good terms with God."

So, Christians today are God's friends too, when they do the works of obedience to Him; when they do really exercise their faith; and, when they do know what God expects, and conform to it. This is what Jesus said in John 15:14: "You are my friends if you do whatever I command you." Such works are not related to going to heaven, but it does make you the friend of Jesus Christ. They are related to your post-salvation faith, producing an intimacy with God.

John 14:21 speaks to the same thing: "And he that has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me. And he loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him. Judas said unto him (not Iscariot), 'Lord, how it that You will manifest Yourself into us, and not unto the world?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'If a man loves Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come up unto him, and make our abode with him.'" You can see why I have told you repeatedly that you cannot even love God until you have learned the doctrines of Scripture, because it is when you are responsive to His commands that you can develop the capacity to love Him.

Justification of a Christian by his works, then, deals with people seeing his faith, and singing that faith vindicated. I reiterate that James does not say that justification by faith to eternal life cannot exist from justification by works. It can. As a matter of fact, this is generally the case with Christians. Most Christians are justified by their faith. They are going to heaven, but their lives are going down a rat hole. They are being wasted because they do not keep their faith alive and functioning with Christian good works in God's service. They are the people that are sadly referred to in Matthew 16:24-27. Listen carefully: "Then said Jesus unto His disciples (we are now talking to believers), 'If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'" What is your cross? The cross of Jesus Christ was the mission to die for the sins of the world. That was God's plan for Him. Your cross is God's plan for you – your plan of Christian service.

There is another point in the Word of God were Paul says that God has called you to be come His workman, as per the works that He has preordained for you to do. So, there is a job committed for you. Then, verse 25 says, "For whosoever will save his life (whosoever will preserve the value of your breathing, and living, and walking around on this earth for a period of time, preserved for your use) will lose it (in terms of eternity); and, whosoever will lose his life;" that is, you will say, "Boy, there are so many things I'd like to do, but first comes God's service. Three are many things I'd like to buy, but first come God's financing. There are so many places I'd like to go, but first there is God's work to be taken care of: "You will lose your life for My sake, but you're going to find it. For what is a man (and don't forget this is talking about a disciple man, or a Christian man): So, what is a Christian man or woman profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul." And there it should be translated 'life.' It's exactly the same word taken up above in verse 25: "Whosoever will save his life" is the same word in the Greek ("psuche"), and it should be translated as "life:" You will lose your life."

What does he mean? Well, he could mean physical death? We've see that. But it's worse than that. It' losing the value of your life as a believer: "Or what should a man give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He shall reward everyone according to his works." Do you see what the context is talking about? Rewards. And how do you lose your life? You lose it in terms of investing it for eternity. James says, "The less faith you have, the less concerned you are for serving God." Rahab's faith preserved her life and the life of her household. In the very process of exercising her faith in God, she was vindicated (justified) before men – a different kind of justification than her justification to eternal life. And as a result, her faith was strengthened and deepened.

James does not teach that you have to do good works to go to heaven. He doesn't teach that you have to do them to prove that you're a Christian. He says that a born-again person's faith is kept alive and functioning by obeying Bible doctrine, and serving God with your spiritual gifts.

Then he comes to his conclusion – verse 26, where we began: "For as the human body is dead without the spirit functioning, so, your faith as a Christian is dead without divine good works functioning in your life." The Christian church today has upon it the enormous fall of dead faith – people who are going to heaven, but whose faith has gradually withered away; diminished; and, become so weak, because their lives are not invested in God. They are not trusting in God. They're afraid of what's coming next. They are preoccupied with taking care of their sensual needs. They just do not lean on God and say, "I'm your man. I'm your woman. And I have confidence in You. And I know that You will vindicate me. As You have justified me unto eternal life, You will justify me unto eternal rewards as a result of exercising my faith." And every time you exercise the muscle of faith, it gets stronger. And the result of that is going to be great rejoicing for you at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

That's why I Paul says, in Romans 12: "Giving your body as a sacrifice to God, to be engaged in Christian service activity, is a very rational thing to do." Then he proceeds to explain to us the ways in which that is done, and the consequences of that kind of investment of a life. May God help us to get a new focus on what we're doing with our lives, and a new concern for what kind of strength we have in our faith. It will affect your eternity.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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