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The Creed of Jesus.

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Creed or Deed? — In a recent issue of the *Presbyterian* (July 31, 1924) the editor, under the heading, "Doctrines as Tests," touches upon a subject of vital present-day interest. He writes: —

"It is popular to decry doctrines as tests — whether the question, What is Christianity? or the question, *What is a Christian?* is under consideration. When a reason is given, it is usually to the effect that *doctrines are not essential to Christianity*. Some allege that Christianity consists of its facts rather than its doctrines, while others affirm that it is *life, not doctrines*. If either of these allegations is sound, it is evident that doctrines belong to that which is secondary rather than that which is primary to the Christian religion. If such is the case, the rejection of doctrinal tests merits universal approval. Unless doctrines enter into the very substance of Christianity, both as a system of thought and as a way of life, it is evident, to say the least, that doctrinal tests are inadequate.

"It is frequently said that Christianity consists of *its facts rather than its doctrines*. It is impossible, however, to have *the facts of Christianity* apart from its doctrines. Give up the doctrines, and at the same time we give up the facts. There is no sieve discoverable that will strain out the doctrines and save the facts. . . .

"It is frequently said that *Christianity is life, not doctrine*. What is meant is that doctrines are secondary in Christianity, that they are but the intellectual expression of the life that precedes them. From this point of view, doctrines are the products, rather than the producers, of the Christian life. As such they possess only a relative significance, and one set of doctrines may be as good as another. At any rate, the life is the one thing of vital importance, and as long as it flourishes, the doctrines may be allowed to take care of themselves."

Does James Contradict Paul?

Jas. 2, 14—26.

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(Submitted at the request of the Sheboygan Lutheran Conference.)

When Luther first came across this passage in the Epistle of St. James, he thought it contained an attack on Paul's doctrine of justification by faith and a defense of the pharisaic doctrine of salvation by works. Philip Melancthon, Luther's friend and co-worker, was of the same opinion; for he is reported to have said: "Whoever could reconcile them," namely, the teachings of James with those of St. Paul, "on him will I put my cap and allow him to call me a fool."

Both of these men, of course, were mistaken, because there is no contradiction here between Paul and James. "It is more than likely," as Prof. A. T. Robertson points out, "that James wrote his epistle before the Judaizing controversy came to a head, probably between A. D. 45 and 48. Certainly at the Jerusalem conference on the subject of imposing the Mosaic ceremonial regulations on the Gentile Christians, James took the side of Paul and Peter, apparently presided over the conference, and offered the solution that gave Paul the victory and the Gentiles liberty. (Acts 15, 1—29.) There is a striking resemblance in tone and style between the letter to the church at Antioch (Acts 15, 23—29) and the Epistle of James. But this section in the Epistle of James does not contradict Paul's plea for justification by faith, not of works, when properly interpreted. Paul, by 'justification,' refers to the initial act by which we are set right with God, while James, by the same term, refers to the proof of the profession which we make. There is therefore no contradiction, because the two writers are discussing different things. They likewise use 'works' in a different sense. Paul, in Rom. 3 and 4, by 'works' means the ceremonial system (legalism) as opposed to free grace, while James uses works in the sense of life. This passage of James is to be compared with Rom. 6—8 rather than with Rom. 3 and 4. By 'faith' Paul means personal trust in Jesus as the Savior from sin.

James uses 'faith' in two senses in this passage, the Pauline sense and that of mere intellectual assent to theological propositions (namely, faith of the head and mouth). James does not combat faith *per se*; but dead faith. Two ways of showing faith are presented, one by works (to prove that faith is present), the other without works (which proves that real, true faith, deserving of the name, is absent). The contrast here is not faith versus works, but live faith versus dead faith. What James pleads for is a faith that bears fruit in the life (like a good tree bearing good fruit), as was seen in the case of Abraham and Rahab." ¹⁾

St. James begins his dissertation on live faith versus dead faith with the words: "What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works? Can faith [existing merely in his mouth] save him?" Jesus makes a statement similar to that of James: "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. 7, 21. The Apostle John says: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He [the Father] is righteous." 1 John 3, 7. God demands performance, not mere profession. "What doth it profit?" James asks. What is the use, what good is it, "though a man say he hath faith and have not works (to prove his faith)? Can [such a] faith [which is nothing but a mere assertion] save him?" As an excuse, faith is worth no more than mere words of love, love that is found in the mouth. So James goes on with his argument: "If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food and one of you say to them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled [that is, fill yourselves with food]; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" A brother or sister is in need of food and clothing. They are out of work because of the economic conditions beyond their control. Unable to obtain work, they beg for something to wear and something to eat. Pious platitudes and cheap words of sympathy will not relieve their needs. Perhaps the pious pretenders actually think that the needy should be grateful for the kind advice when sent away without a mouthful to eat. Did Jesus ask the multitudes who came to Him in the desert place to be satisfied with honeyed words and the aroma of dinner? No, He fed them with bread and

1) See *Homiletic Review*, February, 1917. The words in parentheses are mine. — W. M. C.

fishes. St. John says: "Whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." 1 John 3, 17. 18. Real love is known by these two marks: words of love and deeds of love. He who loves only with his words proves that he does not love at all. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead in itself." The hermit is dead to the world, though not dead in himself. The faith of which James here speaks is dead in itself, dead as a corpse; for the apostle does not say, Faith that hath not works dies; but he says, "It is dead." There is no life in it, no reality. Thus James tries to bring the pious pretender to his senses, pointing out that as little as he who loves in words only can claim to love his fellow-man, so little can he claim to have true faith who has nothing wherewith to back up this assertion, no works to prove his faith. But the apostle hits the pious pretender still harder. James sees an imaginary objector before him, who challenges the apostle about his faith, since he has put such accent on works.²⁾ "Thou, James, hast thou faith? I also (as well as thou) have works." The objector thus claims to have both faith and works, but implies that James has only works and no faith. James bursts in with the answer to the challenge and rests his claim to faith on works as proofs. "Show me thy faith without [apart from] thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." Here James pits over against each other the two sorts of faith—the true faith, which James claims to possess and which is proved by works; and the false faith, which is mere profession and entirely apart from works. The antithesis is complete. The dispute turns on how one knows that he has faith. James rests his case on his works and, in turn, challenges the objector to prove his faith apart from his works. Here we have the very essence of the apostles' teachings: Works bear witness to, are the proofs of, faith. He who has no works cannot prove his faith for no less a reason than that he has no faith. "Who is a wise man," says James in the following chapter of our epistle, vv. 13—15, "and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness and wisdom. But if ye have bitter envy and strife in your hearts, glory not and lie not against the truth. [For] this [professed] wisdom [which is accompanied by envy and strife and lacks meek-

2) Prof. A. T. Robertson's solution of this difficult sentence.

ness] descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish." And in the previous chapter, v. 26, the apostle says: "If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." Everywhere the apostle argues from works backward. Where there are no works, there is no faith. Supposing you had a sort of faith, the very absence of good works would always prove that it is not the true, saving faith. For instance: "Thou believest that there is one God. Thou doest well" to believe that (over against the polytheism of the heathen); for it is written in Holy Scripture: "The Lord, our God, is one Lord." But such a faith will never save thee. Why, the devils believe that and tremble. V. 19. The devils are orthodox on this point, knowing that God is one. If your faith is no better than that of the devils, it surely cannot be the saving faith; for the devils will not be saved. The argument is a complete knock-out, and the objector is forced to take the count. James speaks to the objector, "But wilt thou know, O vain man," you senseless fellow (you can know it if you wish to), "that faith without works is dead," barren, unprofitable, unproductive, like a barren woman who has no children to comfort her?

If his objector is still dull in his understanding, James hopes to make himself clear by introducing the example of Abraham's faith. "Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar?"³⁾ A fictitious faith would never have done what Abraham did. If Abraham proves that only such faith which is accompanied by works is the true, living faith, then, contrariwise, it is proved that faith without works is dead in itself. In Gen. 22, 11 we read that after Abraham had stretched forth his hand and taken the knife to slay his son, "the Angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad; . . . for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." In vv. 16—18 there follows a precious promise that in Abraham's Seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.⁴⁾ What kind of a declaration of righteousness do we find here? Are more of Abraham's sins forgiven because of his obedience? Not a syllable of that is mentioned here. On the contrary, the Angel of the Lord declares in the hearing of Isaac and, with him, before every one, publicly and audibly,

3) Philippi, *Glaubenslehre*.

4) See Preuss, *Die Rechtfertigung*, p. 172 ff.

that Abraham feared the Lord. He, however, who according to the Scriptures, fears God is declared righteous. Ever since Abraham had heard the call of God, he had been declared righteous; but this declaration was not made public, nor was it made on the ground of Abraham's works, but solely on account of faith, as Moses writes, Gen. 15, 6. But because of Abraham's humble obedience, which was a witness to God and, at the same time, a good work, Abraham's righteousness is declared publicly. St. James can therefore mean nothing but the public declaration of Abraham's righteousness, for otherwise he would have wilfully perverted the clear words of Gen. 22. If James had God's public and solemn declaration in mind, he fired a broadside into the camp of these mere mouth-believers with the story of Abraham; for they claimed Abraham as their example of a faith without work. St. James tells them that they had no right to such a claim.

V. 22. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works?" In Abraham faith and works are inseparable. "And by works was faith made perfect," complete. When a ship approaches us on the ocean, we see the sails or the mast first of all. After a while we see the hull, and then the ship becomes completely visible. Thus we may hear some one confess his faith, but his faith is not complete until we have seen his works. Faith in the mouth alone is like the sails of a ship without the hull. Thus Abraham's faith was "made perfect" by his obedience, and the Scripture was (visibly) fulfilled which says: "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." Philippi says: "This word of Scripture was like an unfulfilled promise, because Abraham's faith-righteousness was invisible until his obedience brought it to light. A saying is fulfilled when its statements are confirmed by facts that follow."

Now we see the perfect harmony between James and Paul. The righteousness of Abraham by faith, on which Paul builds his whole doctrine, is also what James teaches, only that James does not deal with the origin of faith, but with its manifestation. James says: "Abraham was called the friend of God." He had been God's friend long ago, as the eleventh chapter of Hebrews proves, but he was called God's friend only after he had brought his son as a sacrifice to God and the Angel of the Lord had given him the audible and solemn witness that he feared God. That is always God's way. First He clothes His own with the garment of Christ's righteousness, then they praise Him and do good works; finally they may also receive praise of men.

V. 24. "Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." The case of Abraham shows that works must follow faith in the natural order of grace. Faith as a ground of justification is assumed as a starting-point. Then faith, which has changed the sinful heart and made it new, buds and blossoms forth into good works like a fruit-bearing tree. Faith and works go hand in hand in a well-regulated Christian life. They belong together, just as husband and wife belong together, or as a mother and her child belong together.

James adduces another example from Scripture to prove the point he wants to make. His choice falls upon a heathen and a proselyte, the first of all proselytes in the land of Canaan. It is Rahab, the woman who had lived the life of a harlot. "Likewise also was not Rahab, [even though] the harlot, justified by works when she had received the messengers and had sent them out another way?" V. 25. The story of Rahab is found in Joshua, chapters 2 and 6. According to Josh. 2, 11 she first confessed with her lips that the God of Israel was God in heaven above and in earth beneath, and afterwards she proved the true nature of her faith by saving the spies. That led to her public justification; for, when Joshua had captured Jericho, he said to the two men who had spied out the country: "Go into the harlot's house and bring out thence the woman and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. And the young men that were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brethren and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred and left them without the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire and all that was therein. And Joshua saved Rahab, the harlot, alive . . . because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." Josh. 6, 22—25. How is it possible, in the light of this narrative, to deny that James is speaking of the public justification? Where do we read that Rahab, because of her good works, received a greater measure of forgiveness? This alone is certain, that she, as a result of the good work done before the eyes of all Israel, was led out of Jericho and spared. Therefore she is a positive proof for the statement of James that not faith alone, but faith and works, justifies before men. If Rahab had done no more than to confess: Your God is "God in heaven above and in earth beneath," Israel would never have declared her righteous. But because she not only confessed (said that she had faith), but also saved the spies, her life was spared. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead." When a human

body is found in the forest, the first thing that we try to do is to see whether it still breathes. If it breathes, we know that the body is still alive; if it does no longer breathe, we say we have found a dead person. Thus it is with faith. If the witness of works is not there, every man judges that it is dead.

Thus we have the plain meaning of Jas. 2, 14—26. Our fathers have always understood this passage thus. All other explanations are either contrary to God's Word or do not do full justice to this text. Some say James contradicts Paul. If he did, then God's curse would fall upon him, as it is written Gal. 1, 8: "But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." In reality, James has preached no other gospel; for in chapter 1, 18 he has taught that we are begotten by the Word of Truth, and in chapter 1, 21, that God's Word is able to save our souls, and that by receiving it with meekness, that is, by believing it, we are declared righteous and are justified before God as children of our heavenly Father and receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Others, like the Jesuit Perrone, say: "There is harmony between James and Paul, namely thus: Both teach that 'faith justifies *per opera*.'" Truly, neither of these two teach such a doctrine; for Paul teaches that we are justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law, and James, that we are justified by faith and works. He who does not want to admit that Paul is speaking of the hidden justification of a sinner before God and James of the public justification of a child of God before men, even as Jesus does in Matt. 25, 31—46, had better not attempt to make fire and water mix.

A more silly solution of the problem before us is advocated by the father of Socinianism. "When James says works," Faustus Socinus advises us, "he means faith." A truly remarkable discovery! Indeed, we would have to be prepared to make a considerable change in the whole system of Christian doctrine if this principle, to exchange one contrast for the other, should ever gain ground.

If we take Jas. 2, 14—26 without the perversions of Socinianism and Jesuitism,⁵⁾ it becomes to us a clear, wholesome, in-

5) Preuss, *Die Rechtfertigung*, p. 188.

dispensable chapter. For nowhere else in Scripture can you find the medicine needed against the misunderstanding and misuse of Paul's doctrine so often made by the old Adam. One is almost tempted to take out a drop of James's doctrine and put it, with the author of the Codex Alexandrinus, after Rom. 8, 1, both as an explanation and as a warning: "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Who walk not after the flesh," are the words added by the writer of the Codex Alexandrinus. And a corrector of Claromontanus supplied the words: "but after the Spirit."

In the *International Critical Commentary* on James, James Hardy Ropes says: "In 2, 14—26 James is not engaged in doctrinal controversy, but is repelling the practical misuse which was made, or which might be made, of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone in order to excuse moral laxity." (p. 35.)
