

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JAMES' "WORKS" AND PAUL'S
"FAITH" FOR EVANGELICAL AND NON-EVANGELICAL
CHRISTIANS IN MYANMAR: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF
JAMES 2:14-26 AND ROMANS 3:21-28

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The purpose of this research is to find out how works and faith relate in the writings of James and Paul. Special attention will be given to the original texts, and an exegetical work, in order to better understand the purposes of James and Paul for Christians in the nation of Myanmar today.

Introduction

Roman Catholic missions began in Myanmar (formerly called Burma) in 1554, with Protestant Christianity coming in 1807. According to Myanmar church history, Christians began to divide into two groups following a revival that occurred in the 1970s. Some, mainly from the mainline churches, began to focus on social ministry at the expense of meeting the spiritual needs of the people, based on James 2:26 (NIV): "... so faith without works is dead." As a result, non-believers have little opportunity to hear the gospel from those churches. On the other hand, the evangelical Christians emphasized being saved by faith alone, based on Romans 3:28 (NIV): "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law," and are less concerned about "doing" Christian charity. This lack of social concern tends to result in non-believers being uninterested in evangelical Christianity. According to the teaching of the Scripture, these two "schools of thought" need to be addressed. Only then will Myanmar Christians be instrumental in advancing the gospel.

The research presented here attempts to address the issue of how to synthesize these widely divergent views. Thus, the path we have taken is to do an exegetical study of both James 2:14-26 and Romans 3:21-

28. The goal is to provide a proper understanding of how faith and works relate, which former Myanmar Christian leaders failed to teach succeeding generations. To realize that goal, our investigation needs to dig out from the original texts what Paul and James actually meant when writing to their original readers and then the implication of those texts for us today. For the sake of space, what is presented here will be limited to the contemporary issues among the evangelical and non-evangelical Christians in Myanmar.

Definitions of Evangelical and Non-Evangelical

The term “Evangelical” has been defined in various ways. In the Myanmar context, however, it means those Christians who believe “in the infallibility and the authority of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the atoning death of Christ for the salvation of human kind, his bodily resurrection, his second coming and personal salvation by faith through grace”.¹ For evangelicals, evangelism is the primary task and social ministry is secondary. Evangelical Christians have no attachment to the ecumenical movement in Myanmar.²

The term “non-Evangelical” in the Myanmar context means those Christians who do not share the same statement of faith with the evangelical Christians. Rather, they embrace the ecumenical movement, which is “so dominated by the theologically liberal denominations,”³ the adherents are generally nominal Christians.⁴ Khai wrote, “The ecumenical movement in Myanmar, represented by the Myanmar Council of Churches (known also as the Conciliar Movement), includes nearly all the mainline churches. They emphasize the priority of the cultural mandate over that of the evangelistic mandate.”⁵ In other words, they advocate a social ministry rather than a spiritual one.

In summary, strictly speaking, those Christians who experience the new birth (John 3:5) are evangelicals, whereas anyone who has never experienced the new birth, yet consider themselves Christians, are considered non-evangelical. In this paper, I will use the terms “non-

¹Chin Khua Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement Among the Zomi in Myanmar” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), 24.

²Ibid.

³Kawl Thang Vuta, “A Brief History of the Planting and Growth of the Church in Burma” (D.Miss. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1983), 264.

⁴Khai, “Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement Among the Zomi in Myanmar,” 25.

⁵Ibid., 24-25.

evangelical" and "nominal" interchangeably because they are synonyms in the Myanmar context.

Background of Myanmar Christianity

Myanmar is predominantly an animistic country.⁶ It is generally assumed that Buddhism took root there in the first century; however, not until the 11th century, during the reign of King Anaw-Rahta, did Buddhism become well known.⁷ Buddhism was made the state religion in 1961.⁸ Christianity entered the country through the efforts of several missionaries, notably a French Franciscan and a Roman Catholic from Portugal, in 1554.⁹ Later James Charter, Richard Mardon, and Felix Carey (eldest son of William Carey), Baptists from England in 1807, began mission work in Rangoon, now Yangon and the former capital of Myanmar.¹⁰

Six years later, the first American Baptist missionaries to Burma, Adoniram and Ann Judson, arrived in Rangoon.¹¹ Their labor among the Myanmar people was exceptional, the first Burmese Bible being one of the products of their assiduous work.¹² The Myanmar Institute of Theology (formerly Myanmar Divinity School), founded in 1927, became the most prestigious Baptist seminary from which former and present Christian leaders received their theological and ministerial training.

Pentecostalism came to existence in Myanmar long after the mainline churches were well established. The Lisu people, who had emigrated to Myanmar's Kachin State from southwest China, were the first recipients of Pentecostalism. In 1930, Clifford and Lavada Morrison, Assemblies of God missionaries to southwest China, had

⁶Nat worship was already in existence before Theravada Buddhism became the religion of Myanmar. See, Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1962), 1-2.

⁷Hla Pe, *Burma: Literature, Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life, and Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), 189.

⁸"Burma," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. II (1967): 901.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Chin Khua Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas: A History of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar* (Baguio City: APTS Press, 2003), 40.

¹¹Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle* (Rangoon: Burma Baptist Convention, 1963), 1-4.

¹²Vuta wrote in his dissertation that Adoniram Judson dedicated his Burmese Bible to God in January 31, 1834, and it was printed in December 29, 1835 (1983).

ministered to the Lisu in China before they emigrated.¹³ The next year, Yong Paul and Esther, a married couple from southwest China, were sent to the Lisu in Kachin State, making that couple the first Assemblies of God missionaries to Myanmar.¹⁴ In November 1938, the Lisu in Myanmar began to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit, one of whom spoke in English, which he had never learned.¹⁵ According to Saw Tint San Oo, in 1940, the Morrisons and Mrs. Jean Wagner first visited the Assemblies of God churches in Kachin State, ministering to more than 500 members in their first service.¹⁶

A study of Myanmar church history shows that Christianity first entered among the minority tribal people groups.¹⁷ Today, the need to evangelize the typical Bamas¹⁸ is enormous. Although a number of mission organizations worked in Myanmar from the 1800s to the 1900s, the Baptist mission was most successful.¹⁹ As a result, "Today, the Baptists are the largest single denomination in the country and among the Zomis as well,"²⁰ with Baptist missions and churches found almost everywhere in the country. Three-fourths of Myanmar Christians identify themselves as Baptists, according to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Factbook.²¹ The denomination celebrated its bicentennial in 2013.

¹³Adele Flower Dalton, "How Pentecost Reached Burma," *Mountain Movers* (September 1980): 10.

¹⁴Saw Tint Sann Oo, "The Indispensable Mission: The History of the Assemblies of God Theological Education in Myanmar" (Th.M. thesis, Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, 2003), 20. See note, 48.

¹⁵Dalton, 10.

¹⁶Oo, 22.

¹⁷Most Christians are from the minority ethnic groups such as the Chin, Karen, Lisu, Kachin, and Lahu. See "Christianity in Burma," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Burma (accessed August 6, 2014).

¹⁸The Bamas are the majority people group with strong Buddhist adherence. There is a saying that "to be a Myanmar citizen is to be a Buddhist." They are considered the hosts of the land of Myanmar where ethnic people groups are considered guests. The Bamas are in control of the systems of the government of Myanmar.

¹⁹Lunminthang Haokip recorded that out of the 4% Christians, 3% of the total population of the Union of Myanmar are said to be Baptist. See "Christianity in Myanmar," http://e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=leisure.Essays.Lunminthang_Haokip.Christianity_In_Myanmar (accessed August 5, 2014).

²⁰Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement Among the Zomi in Myanmar," 129. The Zomis are one of the ethnic people groups who reside in northern part of Chin State. In general, they are known as Chins because of their location in Chin State.

²¹The 4% of the population of Myanmar is Christian (Baptist 3%, Roman Catholic 1%). See "Christianity in Burma."

The Theological Debate between Faith and Works in Myanmar

The majority of Christian leaders in Myanmar are graduates of the liberal Baptist seminary.²² Because of the influence of the seminary's liberal theology, these leaders (including Hau Lian Kham²³) became liberal. As a result, "By the 1960s, mainline churches were more inclined to theological liberalism than toward evangelistic priorities."²⁴ Concerning liberalism, Saw Gler Taw wrote, "And because of liberalism in the theological schools in Burma today, their graduates who serve in various churches seem to lose the vision for the mission of the church, and their congregations gradually become nominal, losing their zeal and vitality in outreach."²⁵ In this case, it is obvious that these Christians are spiritually dead, having no experience of the new birth (John 3:5). In other words, they are nominal, or non-evangelical, Christians.

The nominal Christians believe in the teaching of "salvation by faith plus good works."²⁶ The Burma Council of Churches²⁷ "does not encourage the evangelical efforts of evangelical churches and para-church ministries" (Vuta 1983), but rather "Professional ministries encouraged social works; but all the while, the church declined and became spiritually lukewarm" (Khai 1999). For these reasons, the church lost the biblical directive of preaching the gospel. Therefore, the nominal Christians, both ministers and lay persons, need a renewal of salvation knowledge.

²²This seminary is the largest Baptist seminary where the former and present Christian leaders received their theological training. It has become a liberal Baptist seminary since 1960. See Chin Khua Khai, "Legacy of Hau Lian Kham (1944-1995): A Revivalist, Equipper, and Transformer for the Zomi-Chin People of Myanmar," *Asian Journal Pentecostal Studies* 4(1) (2001):102. See note 7.

²³Khai wrote that Hau Lian Kham earned his Bachelor of Religious Education from the liberal Baptist seminary. Fortunately, Kham abandoned his liberal bent when he came to faith in the Lord and accepted the whole of Scripture as the word of God sometime in 1970. Later, he became the great preacher of the gospel (2001).

²⁴Khai, *The Cross Among the Pagodas: A History of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar*, 192.

²⁵Saw Gler Taw, "A Renewal Strategy of the Karen Baptist Church of Myanmar (Burma) for Mission" (Th.M. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1992), 127. See note

²⁶Khai, "Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement Among the Zomi in Myanmar," 318. The term 'nominal teaching' in Myanmar context is a teaching that "in order to be saved, one must believe Christ, do good works, take water baptism, and go to church" (Khai 1999).

²⁷The Burma Council of Churches with its adherent of nominal Christians is more concerned about social gospel than meeting the spiritual needs of the people.

In the midst of such spiritual laxity, God raised up evangelists for a renewal movement. In the early 1960s, Lal Than Liana, founder of the Evangelical Free Church in Burma, began preaching the gospel with a born-again message, but only a few responded to that message.²⁸ According to Khai, in the 1970s, Hau Lian Kham, who was senior pastor of Cope Memorial Baptist Church in Tedim (Chin State), began preaching a renewal or salvation message. The Baptist church, being spiritually dead,²⁹ rejected his new found faith and dismissed him not only from his position, but also from Baptist membership. Those who accepted his renewal message joined him to start the Evangelical Baptist Convention for the advancement of God's kingdom.³⁰ Despite the opposition, many people got saved through his preaching. Consequently, a number of them became evangelists who are now serving the Lord effectively. Through these efforts, more members were added to the evangelical faith.

The renewal message of Hau Lian Kham marked the dawning of the evangelical movement³¹ among the Zomis—a movement that later spread over the whole country. Since the Zomis were the first recipients of the evangelical faith, they now form the highest percentage of Christians among all the ethnic groups,³² even though they are a minority in population.³³ Since many Zomis are involved in evangelical Christian organizations and missionary outreaches

²⁸Khuang Nawni, *The History and Growth of the Churches in Chin State* (Th.M. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, June 1990), 69.

²⁹The Christian leaders in those days saw no need to engage in evangelistic outreach. Vuta wrote: "The Baptist missionaries and national leaders did not understand the charismatic characteristics of the new converts during the revival years (1946-50)." See Vuta, 210; Khai also recorded: "There existed among the Zomi Christians a moral laxity and a lack of salvation knowledge." See "Legacy of Hau Lian Kham (1944-1995): A Revivalist, Equipper, and Transformer for the Zomi-Chin People of Myanmar," 100.

³⁰Khai, "Legacy of Hau Lian Kham (1944-1995): A Revivalist, Equipper, and Transformer for the Zomi-Chin People of Myanmar," 101.

³¹Khai wrote, "The evangelical stream emerged as a return to biblical faith when the conciliar stream embraced liberal theology in the 1950s." See "Dynamics of Renewal: A Historical Movement Among the Zomi," 314.

³²According to IRIN: Asia Myanmar, Myanmar is a majority Buddhist country but more than 80 percent of the people in Chin State are Christian. See "Myanmar Chin State," <http://www.irinnews.org/report/87352/myanmar-chin-state-a-mountain-of-trouble> (accessed September 8, 2014). God uses the Chins (Zomis) in the present generation for the advancement of His kingdom; as a result there is a Zomi missionary in every part of the country.

³³Ethnic Composition in Burma (rough estimate) as of August 6, 2014, is as follows: Bamar 68%, Shan 9%, Karen, 7%, Rakhine 3.5%, Chinese 2.5%, Mon 2%, Kachin 1.5%, Indians 1.3%, Chin 1%, Kayah 0.8%, Other groups 5%. See "Burma," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burma#Religion> (accessed August 6, 2014).

throughout Myanmar, it is obvious that God is using them in a great way in this present generation. They are, indeed, instrumental in preaching the evangelical message throughout the country

From the above discussion, it is now obvious that there are two kinds of Christians in Myanmar—the evangelicals and non-evangelicals. The evangelical Christians are involved in doing ministries in which the evangelistic gospel is of primary concern, whereas the non-evangelicals focus on the social gospel (Khai 1999).

Today, biblical teaching about salvation is an urgent need in order for people to get salvation knowledge, which has long been neglected by many church leaders both in the past and in the present. The non-evangelical leaders teach a mixture of faith and works, quoting “faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26) as a proof text for their teaching and advocate a social gospel without including a salvation message. They build hospitals, orphanages, and schools as part of their community development work, and they teach people to do good works without meeting their spiritual needs. They think that their good works merit the favor of God for salvation, and they consider faith alone as passive, often criticizing others for neglecting social issues. On the mission field, evangelists are often confronted by non-evangelical Christian leaders who accuse them of “stealing their sheep.”³⁴ Thus, non-evangelical teaching has indeed become a roadblock for the advancement of God’s kingdom in Myanmar.

On the other hand, evangelicals are focused on justification by faith alone and concerned about the spiritual needs of people. They do evangelistic crusades, church planting, teaching seminars, and missionary works. While these are indeed crucial, evangelicals should not neglect “good works” or forget the social benefits of those works. That is why the research presented here is essential for understanding the relationship between faith and works.

An Exegetical Study of James 2:14-26

Relative to this issue of faith and works, an exegetical study of this passage is of great importance because, “Some have imagined that there is a quarrel between James and Paul on this fundamental matter.”³⁵ In this respect, “The real problem began when Luther

³⁴Nawni, 87.

³⁵Guy H. King, *A Belief that Behaves: An Expositional Study of the Epistle of James* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1941), 53.

concluded that the difference in this case was a contradiction.”³⁶ Martin Luther called the Epistle of James an “epistle of straw” or a “right strawy epistle.”³⁷ As a result, “The close association of “faith” and “works” has led interpreters going back to Luther in the 6th century to view James as in direct conflict with Paul.”³⁸ James wrote his letter to encourage and exhort those Jews who had fled from persecution and lived outside Palestine.³⁹ He admonishes them to be strong in the faith; and at the same time, he exhorts the rich people not to neglect their fellow poor Christians. Particularly in this passage, James deals with the static faith of Christians who fail to do Christian charity. He strongly encourages his readers “to be doers of the Word.”⁴⁰

The issue of faith and works is a big theological problem among the Christians in Myanmar. To make matters worse, there is a Buddhist teaching outwardly similar to James’ words, “A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (2:24 NIV). Buddhism is a do-it-yourself religion, which teaches that a person must earn his own salvation by meritorious deeds. Since Myanmar is a Buddhist country, this teaching has had a strong influence. As a result, the nominal Christians mistakenly understood the idea of works as a means of earning salvation. Therefore, an exegetical study of James 2:14-26 should help Myanmar Christians to better understand how James relates works with justification.

James’ Theology of Works

As Martin discovered, 2:14-26 is James’ judgment on the danger of a self-deceiving attitude.⁴¹ In this regard, Douglas J. Moo asserts, “James is combating some false teachers who were setting forth an

³⁶Luke Timothy Johnson, “*The Letter of James*,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 197; T. Carson states, “This is the celebrated passage which was a stumbling-block to Martin Luther. He considered it impossible to reconcile Paul and James.” See “James,” in *The International Bible Commentary*, eds. F.F. Bruce, H. L. Ellison and G. C. D. Howley (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 1541.

³⁷Sharyn Dowd, “Faith That Works: James 2:14-26,” *Review and Expositor* 97 (2000):195.

³⁸Ralph P. Martin, “*James: Word Biblical Commentary*,” vol. 48 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 80.

³⁹Douglas Moo, “James” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 1151.

⁴⁰Ronald A. Ward, “James” in *The New Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 1222.

⁴¹Martin, 79.

incorrect view of faith.”⁴² In this passage, the word *πίστις* “faith” occurs only once (v.14), whereas *ἡ πίστις* occurs eight times. The *πίστις* without the article *ἡ* introduces a new idea.⁴³

In relation to the word *πίστις*, New Testament scholars like Peter H. Davids, Martin, and others⁴⁴ agree that, in verse 14, James raises a rhetorical question for which he expected a negative answer. Concerning “rhetorical question,” Donald W. Burdick and Simon J. Kistemaker are in agreement that there are two ironic questions.⁴⁵ With regard to the first, Kurt A. Richardson observes, “*ὁ ὄφελος* ‘advantage’ or ‘use’ is employed in a startling way in the text.”⁴⁶ Davids also agrees that a negative answer is expected, adding, “The second rhetorical question (‘Can such faith save him?’) begins with the Greek *μή*, which introduces questions expecting a negative answer.”⁴⁷ In favor of Davids, Joseph B. Mayor writes, “*μή* expects a negative answer, and *ἡ πίστις* is not faith absolutely, but ‘such faith.’”⁴⁸ Therefore, Chris A. Vlachos rightly argues, “James’s illustration in

⁴²Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 99; Martin also states, “James appears to be combating some form of misunderstanding that has developed in the church.” See Martin, 79.

⁴³James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle Of St. James* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 203.

⁴⁴Peter H. Davids wrote, “The question is purely rhetorical, for the form of the question implies James’s expectation of a negative answer. No good at all!” See *James: A Good News Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 37; Martin observed that “V. 14 is composed of two questions, both rhetorical and both constructed to expect answers of no (*μή*). He goes on to say that “The phrase *τί τὸ ὄφελος* signals the beginning of an argumentative style that resembles a diatribe. James appears to be combating some form of misunderstanding that has developed in the church. See Martin, 79.

⁴⁵Donald W. Burdick wrote, “James first states his proposition interrogatively. The two questions posed in this verse (2:14) actually declare that faith not accompanied by good deeds is of no saving value whatsoever.” See “James,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 182; Simon J. Kistemaker wrote, “James began by posing two direct questions which the reader can answer only with a negative reply.” See *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 87.

⁴⁶Kurt A. Richardson, *James: The New American Commentary*, vol. 36 (U.S.A.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 128.

⁴⁷“*τί τὸ ὄφελος* is a regularly occurring phrase in such a dialogical style always expecting a negative answer.” See Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 120.

⁴⁸Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Comments*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 93.

vv.15-16 answers the question raised in v.14: failure to provide for an obvious need calls into question the faith of the one who fails to act (cf. Matthew 25:42-43).⁴⁹

In this respect, *πιστις* and *ἡ πιστις* are clearly defined by Martin, who argues, “The faith of v. 14a is useless for salvation, and the *πιστις* of 14b refers to the ‘workless’ faith of v. 14a.”⁵⁰ He adds, “[There is] No salvation for anyone who has the type of faith described in vv. 15-16a.”⁵¹ With that in mind, we can see that *πιστις* without the article that introduces a new idea (Rope 1991:203) is fully understood; for *ἡ πιστις* “such faith” is a dead faith as opposed to authentic or living faith, like that of Abraham and Rahab, in this context. Thus, the expected negative answer to the second question (“Can such dead faith save?”) is fully met; and the new idea is to be understood in light of “such dead faith cannot save.”

According to Martin, “*λέγει* and *ἐχῆ* indicate a repeated claim: ‘if a person keeps on saying he or she has faith but keeps on having no works.’”⁵² With that in mind, the word *λέγει*⁵³ is crucial to our understanding of the preceding *πιστις*, which a man claims to have without actually possessing it. Thus, he is never motivated to act by what he claims to have. His “claimed faith” never motivates him to take action to do good works. Thus, James is right in saying, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (2:17). Such claimed faith cannot be accompanied by action nor can it produce good works, for it is fraudulent and barren.

Concerning faith, King observed that, for James, there are two kinds of belief—head-belief and heart-belief.⁵⁴ When James deals with the issue “not by faith only” (2:24), he means the faith of just a head-belief,⁵⁵ which is a static faith.⁵⁶ Accordingly, I agree with J. A. Motyer that, in verses 19 and 23, we learn about both “false faith” by which the devils produce fear, and the “genuine faith of Abraham,” which made

⁴⁹Chris A. Vlachos, *James: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2013), 89.

⁵⁰Martin, 81. Martin adds the *πιστις* with article ‘such faith’ (NIV) indicates the previous *πιστις*.

⁵¹Ibid., 80.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Vlachos, 86. Vlachos notes that James’s use of *λέγει* of *λέγω* rather than in the first half of the protasis is likely significant; at issue are empty boasts.

⁵⁴King, 50.

⁵⁵Ibid., 53.

⁵⁶Ibid., 52.

him the friend of God.⁵⁷ Now in this context, we can see that the second question, which expects a negative answer, is fully met because a workless faith is static and dead; as a result, such head-belief cannot confer salvation. Head-belief is described as "faith of the devil" (Mark 1:24; 26-27), and such does not motivate the devils to love and worship God. Satan did not commit to worship God (Matthew 4:10-11). Similarly, if a person professes that he has faith but has no potential of doing good works, his faith is only a head-belief. Thus, the word ὀφελός used in a surprising way, fits the idea of dead faith. "How can such dead faith profit a man and save him?" (2:14).

Now we need to examine what saving faith is. Theodore H. Epp states, "James maintained that, if you have true faith, you will have some works as the outward evidence of the inward salvation."⁵⁸ In this regard, Richardson argues that James does not mean the deeds of faith are effective for salvation, but rather, "The deeds of faith demonstrate the validity of the claim to be a believer."⁵⁹ Thus, Burdick rightly contends, "Faith is an attitude of the inner man, and it can only be seen as it influences the actions of the one who possesses it."⁶⁰ This is evidently seen in Abraham's faith, as PHEME PERKINS theologically argues, "The sacrifice of Isaac constitutes the work that demonstrates the faith of Abraham (Hebrews 11:17)."⁶¹ In favor of Perkins, Moo states, "Faith without works does not justify (2:24)."⁶² However, Moo's argument may lead to misunderstanding of works as necessary for justification. That is why David makes it clear that, "Works are not 'an added extra' to faith, but are an essential expression of it."⁶³ Thus, good works is the fruit of living faith.

It is clear, then, that saving faith is the heart-belief that produces good works in its widest sense. By the saving or true faith, a genuine Christian possesses the potential of doing good works. Again, I agree with what Motyer says, "It [genuine faith] is the root from which good works (James. 2:22; Titus 3:8) grow."⁶⁴ Thus, genuine faith produces

⁵⁷J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James: The Test of Faith* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997), 112.

⁵⁸Theodore H. Epp, *James: The Epistles of Applied Christianity* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Back to the Bible, 1980), 135-6.

⁵⁹Richardson, 129.

⁶⁰Burdick, 183.

⁶¹PHEME PERKINS, "James," *Interpretation: First and Second Peter, James, and Jude* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 113.

⁶²Moo, *The Letter of James: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 108.

⁶³Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary the Greek Text*, 121.

⁶⁴Motyer, 106.

love for God and a heart to live in integrity. In other words, a man of integrity is not lacking good works. This can be seen in a person whose life has been transformed. For example, when a wicked person truly accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit he begins to live a life of worshiping God and not doing wicked things. Genuine faith intrinsically motivates believers to live not only to please God but also to be a blessing to others.

Observation

James T. Draper observed that James wrote his letter to the scattered church, which went through trials and testings.⁶⁵ The church then was composed of Jewish Christians who had been ousted from Palestine into the Gentile world.⁶⁶ Draper argues that James strongly defines works as doing Christian charity because there were poor people (2:16-17) in the Christian community. Thus, in his letter, James dealt with the problem of neglecting the poor.⁶⁷ Robertson contends that, “The antithesis in James is not, in reality, between faith and works but between living faith and dead faith.”⁶⁸ Accordingly, Ropes agrees that, as with Paul, James deals with the problem as being between a living faith and a dead faith (1991:207). Thus, James’ argument is not the “works of the law,” but explicitly the works of faith (Johnson 1998:197) against the empty words.

With regard to living faith, it is not meant for salvation, for as Richardson points out, “Active faith is not that which saves... only the implanted Word is able to save (James 1:21).”⁶⁹ Living faith is meant for good works. To emphasize this issue, E. M. Sidebottom writes, “Works are the outward expression of faith: the two go together like the obverse and reverse of a coin.”⁷⁰ Thus, there is no genuine faith without works, for works are the results of genuine faith.

Obviously, the so-called Christians with dead faith in James’ day claimed that salvation and works were separate. For lack of such saving faith, they were not able to exercise Christian charities to the poor.

⁶⁵James T. Draper, *Faith That Works: Studies in James* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), 12.

⁶⁶A. T. Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, n.d.), 28.

⁶⁷Draper, 13.

⁶⁸Robertson, 93.

⁶⁹Richardson, 129.

⁷⁰E. M. Sidebottom, *The New Century Bible Commentary: James, Jude, 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 43.

Therefore, James “was refuting a heresy claiming that salvation has no bearing on how we live,”⁷¹ wrote Draper. In favor of that point, Nystrom states, “Righteousness that is true will always compel the righteous to acts of mercy and kindness (Romans 2:7).”⁷² Now, we can see that a true Christian (i.e., one has been regenerated by a saving faith) will no longer stand with his hands folded but rather will delight in doing charity to those who are in need. Thus Draper is saying, “Works is the works of love, obedience, kindness, graciousness—i.e., our obedience to God based upon our love for God.”⁷³ James does not teach that works of Christian charity bring about salvation. Salvation belongs to God, for as Richardson argues, “Neither profession of faith nor deeds of faith actually ‘save’ anyone; only God saves.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, although James is deeply concerned with salvation in the last judgment, in this particular portion of his letter, he is not dealing with salvation but rather is challenging people who have such useless faith. For this reason, he strongly opposes the dead faith that does not motivate people to do merciful deeds of charity (Davids 1982).

An Exegetical Study of Romans 3:21-28

Since the 16th century in Martin Luther’s time, the doctrine of justification by faith has been at the heart of Protestant thinking.⁷⁵ Faith, according to Paul, is crucial in terms of salvation—“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (3:28 NIV). Thus, Paul, in this particular passage, is “challenging judgmental Jewish pride (chapters 2-4).”⁷⁶ He teaches that the Jews also need salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. With that in mind, he wrote Romans so that “the Roman church might apprehend the greatness of divine grace and the wideness of God’s mercy.”⁷⁷

Holding the idea of justification by faith alone, Myanmar evangelicals are, to some extent, neglecting social issues. Paul wrote in

⁷¹Draper, 86.

⁷²David P. Nystrom, *James: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 154.

⁷³Draper, 87.

⁷⁴Richardson, 129.

⁷⁵James D. G. Dunn, and Alan M. Suggate, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 5.

⁷⁶Royce Gordon Gruenler, “Romans” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 925.

⁷⁷F. David and Ralph P. Martin, “Romans” in *The New Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 1013.

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV), “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” However, many evangelicals fail to do the good works to which they were called. They are extreme in their belief of the slogan “justification by faith alone” but neglect the teaching of social issues, which are not the means of salvation but rather the fruits of the Christian faith. For this reason, evangelicals should be strong in faith while, at the same time, having a healthy approach to social issues. In order to do so, this segment of research aims at exploring what Paul’s teaching meant to his original audience and then what it means to us. The exegetical study of this section (3:21-28), it is hoped, will help Myanmar evangelicals to better understand Paul’s “justification by faith alone” and how his faith relates to good works.

Paul’s Theology of Faith

As we read in Acts 22:3, Paul is a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and thoroughly trained in the law under Rabbi Gamaliel. Thus, there is no doubt that his theology was influenced by Old Testament (OT) concepts. For this reason, we need to look at how justification or righteousness was understood in the OT in order to better understand Paul’s theology of faith. According to E. R. Achtemeier, we learn that, “Righteousness is, in the OT, the fulfillment of the demands of a relationship, whether that relationship be with men or with God. When God or man fulfills the conditions imposed upon him by a relationship, he is, the OT terms, righteous.”⁷⁸ This concept is clearly found, for example, in Genesis 38:26. Tamar was declared righteous for fulfilling the demands of the levirate law,⁷⁹ while Judah failed to fulfill the law by not giving his third son to her in marriage.⁸⁰ In this case, it is evident that Tamar is called righteous or just because of fulfilling the levirate law. In this manner, a person was declared righteous, or just, by fulfilling or conforming to the law. The idea of OT righteousness is fundamental to the New Testament (NT) righteousness because Paul’s idea of *δικαιοσύνη* is rooted in צדק,⁸¹ which means righteousness that is

⁷⁸E. R. Achtemeier, “Righteousness” in *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 80.

⁷⁹George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. D. A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 481.

⁸⁰Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d.), 92-93.

⁸¹Achtemeier, 80. Achtemeier wrote, “The Septuagint frequently translates צדק with δίκαιο (verb) with δικαιοσύν (noun) with δικαιοσύνη.”

conformity to a rule.⁸² Thus, it is clear that, if conformity to a norm is required for a person to be righteous in OT times, the same is true with sinners in NT times to conform to the righteousness of God in order to be saved.

Now let us examine how Paul deals with justification in the New Testament. In Romans 1:18 to 3:20, he speaks of the wrath of God and His judgment on both Jews and Gentiles; then beginning from 3:21, he speaks of how God demonstrates His saving righteousness in Christ. The revelation of God's wrath in 1:18 is answered by God's saving righteousness in Chapter 3.⁸³ In 3:21, Paul says, "But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets" (NASB). James R. Edwards writes, "'But now' is an exclamation of hope which marks the transition from wrath (1:18) to righteousness (1:17)."⁸⁴ Accordingly, 3:21 indicates a significant transition, a contrast to what Paul had said in 1:18-3:20.⁸⁵ That transition was inaugurated by the coming of Jesus. Thus, this context shows us that Paul is teaching God's righteousness; His saving act is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.⁸⁶

Regarding δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in Romans 3:21-26, Douglas J. Moo observes, "It occurs four times (vv. 21, 22, 25, 26 ['his righteousness' in the last two]), while the related verb δικαιόω 'justify' is found twice (vv. 24, 26) and the adjective δίκαιος 'just' once (v. 26)."⁸⁷ There are interpretations regarding δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. Scholars like James R. Edwards, Robert H. Mounce, and James Dunn are in favor of interpreting it as an objective genitive.⁸⁸ They argue that righteousness is what God offers to sinners, that it is the act of God as he sent Jesus to die for the sin of the world so that He can declare righteousness to anyone who believes in Jesus. This argument, I think, is rather weak

⁸²P. Van Imschoot, *Theology of the Old Testament*. Translated by Kathryn Sullivan, R. S.C.J. and Fidelis Buck, S. J. (Tournai: Desclee Company, 1954), 67.

⁸³A. H. Leitch, "Righteousness," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill Tenney (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 113.

⁸⁴James R. Edwards, *Romans: New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 98.

⁸⁵James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38 (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1988), 164.

⁸⁶A. H. Leitch, 114.

⁸⁷Moo, "Romans," 219.

⁸⁸Edwards, 100. Edwards argues that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is not the attribute of God but is the righteousness with which God is treating humanity. Mounce states that the righteousness of God is of what God offers to the ungodly. See *Romans: The New American Commentary*, vol. 27 (USA: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 114; Dunn notes that the righteousness of God is something he does. See Dunn, 41.

because by what criterion God justifies is in question. As noted above, OT sinners became just or righteous by conforming to the existing criteria. In the same way, NT sinners need to be justified by conforming to the criterion that will be dealt with in the following pages.

In contrast to the objective genitive, Douglas Moo, Brendan Byrne, C. K. Barrett, and Leon Morris argue that *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is the personality of God—that He is just and righteous.⁸⁹ This idea holds that God—who is being right—justifies sinners according to His righteousness. In favor of this subjective genitive argument, Charles Hodge explains that “*δικαιῶ* ‘to justify’ is not simply to pardon but is a forensic term expressing the act of a judge.”⁹⁰ From a judicial point of view, “Yahweh needs to be propitiated because of human sin (cf., e.g., Isaiah 43:22-25).”⁹¹ With that in mind, there must be a sacrifice to Yahweh. And since no animal or human sacrifice qualifies to appease God, the work of Christ is employed⁹² because, “It is the Person of Christ crucified as a means of propitiation or expiation, by whose blood God’s wrath is averted and his mercy dispensed in a total remission of past sin.”⁹³ In this manner, on behalf of sinners, Jesus the Lamb of God by his sacrificial death met the requirement—i.e., conforming to the righteousness of God as the OT people did to the law. Thus, anyone who believes in Jesus Christ is justified. This subjective genitive argument is preferable in this particular context, for the righteousness of God stands as a criterion by which He justifies sinners.

Moreover, Mounce rightly contends, “The righteousness God provides has its origin in what God did, not in what people may accomplish. It is received, not earned.”⁹⁴ It is totally apart from the law,

⁸⁹Moo, “Romans,” 126. Moo asserts that is the righteousness “by which God acts to put people in right relationship with himself.”; Byrne implies that righteousness of God is His integrity by which He judges the human beings. See *Romans: Sacra Pagina Series*, vol. 6, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 123; C. K. Barrett wrote the righteousness of God “includes the quality of being right.” See *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: A & C Black, 1991), 69; Leon Morris asserts that it is the righteousness which originates in God. See *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 103.

⁹⁰Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 81-82.

⁹¹Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., “*Ἰλασκομαι*” in *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 603.

⁹²William G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 75.

⁹³Matthew Black, *Romans: New Century Bible Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 57.

⁹⁴Mounce, 114.

as Paul uses the words *χωρίς νομῶν*.⁹⁵ Therefore, Paul's use of *δωρεάν* corresponding to the Hebrew "חֵן," strongly emphasizes that righteousness is not earned but is a gift of God's grace or favor.⁹⁶ Grace is crucial in the sense that the supreme God makes salvation available to the lowest sinners.⁹⁷ Thus, Brendan Byrne rightly argues, "The righteousness of God is something entirely 'apart from law,' not being based upon fulfillment of the law's requirement ('works of law,' v.20)."⁹⁸ Accordingly, Mounce further avers "No human being can be brought into a right standing with God on the basis of doing what the law requires."⁹⁹ Concerning human beings, Edwards makes it clear that "*σὰρξ* 'flesh' (3:20) means the moral nature which is the willing instrument of sin."¹⁰⁰ This explanation indicates that a sinner is incapable of living morally right before God and fulfilling the demands of the law. The fallen condition of human beings necessitates the atonement of Jesus for right standing (being justified) before God.

Jesus died for the sin of the world by conforming to God's standard of righteousness as He became the "atonement cover"¹⁰¹ corresponding to the Hebrew sacrificial system. God's justice requires the shedding of Jesus' blood so that sinners can have forgiveness of their sins (Hebrews 9:22). Thus, anyone who believes in Jesus is forgiven, justified, and free from judgment because Jesus' sacrifice not only satisfies the demand of justice, but also appeases the wrath of

⁹⁵Shedd, 74-75. Shedd wrote that "*χωρίς* 'apart,' or separate from: entire separation is intended. "*νόμος* is anarthrous, to denote law generally, whether written or unwritten. The law is here put for the 'works of the law,' or obedience."

⁹⁶The word "חֵן" means without cause or compensation (#2855); See Terence E. Fretheim, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 2, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 203; Here the word "*δωρεάν*" used as an adverb corresponds to the Hebrew חֵן *hinnām*; it describes the manner of their justification as that of a free gift, gratis." See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 1975), 206.

⁹⁷Moo, "Romans," 228. Moo wrote that in the LXX, *χάρις* occurs over 190 times. Of those with a Hebrew equivalent (only about 70), most translate חן. This word has the special connotation of the 'assistance' rendered to a weaker person by a stronger.

⁹⁸Byrne, 124.

⁹⁹Mounce, 110-11.

¹⁰⁰Edwards, 93; Dunn suggests that "*πᾶσα σὰρξ* 'all flesh' could be taken simply as a variant translation of the Hebrew כָּל־בָּשָׂר, 'all living' since it is in fact synonymous with כָּל־בָּשָׂר, 'all flesh.'" See Dunn, 155.

¹⁰¹Verbrugge, 603. Verbrugge wrote, "The LXX uses ἱλαστήριον ἡλιαστῆριον 20x for Heb. כִּפּוּרִים, which may be rendered propitiatory or mercy seat, or atonement cover (e.g., Exod. 25:17-22; 31:7; 35:12; Lev. 16:2, 13-15; Num. 7:89).

God.¹⁰² Therefore, there is no righteousness without Jesus Christ because, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2 NIV).

Strictly, “Righteousness is given only through faith in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰³ For this reason Moo states, “Paul highlights faith as the means by which God’s justifying work becomes applicable to individuals.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Dunn argues that, “Faith is the human condition or attitude which is set in contrast to works of the law (3:20-22, 27-28).”¹⁰⁵ In this case, it is obvious that man is only the instrument of sin and is helpless to work for his own salvation. Thus, it demands that God impute His righteousness to sinners.

From the judicial perspective, Schaeffer states, “God does not infuse us with righteousness, God makes a legal declaration; on the basis of the finished work of Christ, God can declare us to be justified.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, it is clear that justification is declared to a person who believes in the finished work of Christ. As mentioned earlier, righteousness is not earned but imputed (i.e., transferred) in the sense that a sinner is justified by *πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, who is the end of the law (Romans 10:4). Similar to the OT law,¹⁰⁷ NT people are declared righteous by believing in Jesus, who fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17). He died on the cross to fulfill the requirement of the law, conforming His life to God’s criterion of justifying sinners. Thus, Paul says that a sinner is justified by faith in Jesus Christ apart from works of the ritual law. It is clear now that Paul is strongly against the works of law as a means of salvation, because faith in Christ is the only way for a sinner to be righteous.

Regarding *πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, we need to examine by whose faith a sinner is saved.¹⁰⁸ The interpretation of this phrase differs among scholars. For example, N. T. Wright supports the genitive subjective

¹⁰²Charles Hodge, *Romans: The Crossway Classic Commentaries* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 89.

¹⁰³Wilhelm Pauck, trans., and ed. *Luther: Lectures on Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, Nd), 109.

¹⁰⁴Moo, “Romans,” 224.

¹⁰⁵Dunn, 166.

¹⁰⁶Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Truth of Romans 1-8: The Finished Work of Christ* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998), 76.

¹⁰⁷As mentioned already, OT people were declared righteous by conforming to the law. NT people become righteous by faith in Jesus who, by his death, conforms to the righteousness of God.

¹⁰⁸Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 53.

that this "faith" is Christ's faithfulness to his death on the cross.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, Matthew Black argues that "It is the believer's faith in Christ which is the ground of the newly manifested righteousness."¹¹⁰ Neutrally, Byrne holds that, despite the fact that the subjective genitive "Jesus' own faith" is acceptable, the whole idea of Paul's thought (especially Galatians 2:16) through the passage refers to the objective genitive "believers' faith in Jesus."¹¹¹ In favor of Byrne, integrating the two opposite views (i.e., faith *in* Christ and faith *of* Christ), Morris thoughtfully puts it this way:

We should bear in mind that Paul is here not describing Christ, but outlining what Christ has done in bringing about salvation, so that we must understand, at least part of the meaning, the objective genitive. *Faith in Jesus Christ* is certainly in mind. But there would be no place for the exercise of this faith were it not for "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" and for "God's faithfulness shown in Jesus Christ." The right standing God gives is connected with his faithfulness and that of Christ, and it certainly is linked with the faith of believers in Christ.¹¹²

I agree with Morris in this case because, if the faithfulness of Christ were not involved, there would be no cross through which the righteousness of God is revealed. On the other hand, if it were only by the faith of Christ, then no one needs to believe. Everybody in the world would be saved automatically. Therefore, I believe that, for the salvation of a sinner, there are three elements involved—the righteousness of God, Christ's faithfulness to the Father, and believers' faith in Jesus Christ.

Observation

Paul, who once strictly held to the Jewish law but now believes in Jesus Christ, sharply argues against observing the ritual law as a way of achieving salvation or justification, because he himself had received the salvation of God by direct intervention of the Lord Jesus on the road to

¹⁰⁹N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), pp. 117, 203.

¹¹⁰Black, 58.

¹¹¹Byrne, 124; See Mounce, 114. Mounce argued, "πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is objective genitive ('faith in Jesus Christ') rather than subjective ('faithfulness of Jesus Christ')."

¹¹²Morris, 175.

Damascus. Before his conversion, he believed that righteousness was earned by obeying the ritual law (i.e., doing works of the law). Contrarily, his experience with the Lord helped him to realize that justification comes through faith in Christ. Therefore, “he was combating those who said that salvation comes by keeping the works of the Mosaic Law.”¹¹³ He taught the Romans to believe in Jesus who is the end of the law, apart from works of the law for justification. The righteousness of God is revealed in Jesus Christ, so that anyone who believes in Him is righteous, or just, before God.

Robertson is right in stating that “Paul, in his contrast between faith and works, has in mind the Jewish doctrine of works as a means of salvation.”¹¹⁴ So too, Paul strongly emphasizes justification by faith alone, in contradiction of the Jews’ demand that “circumcision was essential to the salvation of the Gentiles, that Christianity alone was not sufficient but must be supplemented by Judaism.”¹¹⁵ In this case, we need to understand that Paul does not oppose merciful Christian deeds, but he does oppose those good works (the works of law) as a means of attaining salvation. Thus he said, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” (3:27 NIV).

Comparison Between Works and Faith

Having examined James’ theology of works and Paul’s theology of faith, I believe the following comparison of these two perceptions will help one clearly see the differences and thus recognize the original intent of “works and faith.”

James 2:24 (ASV)

Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith.

James 2:21 (KJV)

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Romans 3:28 (ASV)

We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Romans 4:2 (NIV)

If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about— but not before God.

¹¹³Draper, 86.

¹¹⁴A. T. Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, n.d.), 93.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 91.

Our study shows that James and Paul deal with the issue of works and faith from different angles. James looks at the one side of the coin called faith, while Paul looks at the other side. Or stated another way, James explains the active side of faith and Paul the passive side.¹¹⁶ Here, in short, are the differences—"Paul begins with the Christian life at its very commencement: we are saved by faith alone (Romans 3:28) with no reliance on the works of the law (Galatians 2:16). James begins with the professing Christians who have fallen into wrongheaded ways and need genuine faith."¹¹⁷

There is no doubt that James and Paul are working together for genuine and healthy Christianity. This is evidenced by how they look at Abraham. "James looked to the Abraham story to show how genuine faith operates; Paul looked to the Abraham story to show how God is predisposed to forgive sinners."¹¹⁸ Thus, Paul is concerned for "justification by faith," while James is concerned for "good works as the result of faith."

The interpretation of the Greek *εργα* is of great help to see how James and Paul work in unity, not in contradiction. In this regard, Nystrom observed, "Paul often employs *εργα* to mean 'works of the law;' for James *εργα* means 'deeds of Christian righteousness.'"¹¹⁹ Although the vocabulary is the same, the way it is used is different. When Paul argues that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law (Romans 3:28), he does not mean Christians' good deeds. At the same time, when James argues that faith without works is dead (James 2:26), he does not mean the works of law. As a result, James is not against Paul's faith and Paul is not against James' good works; however, James condemns the dead-faith Christians just as Paul condemns the Christians who trust in the works of the law for salvation.

Likewise, when James speaks of justification by works, not by faith (2:24), he is concerned with the Christian deeds that demonstrate one's justification. And by the words "not by faith", he means the kind of faith that does not produce good fruits. James does not oppose the kind of faith that Paul claims for salvation. Therefore, as Robertson argues, "It is not personal trust in Christ that James ridicules but an empty theological tenet that does not stand the test of actual life."¹²⁰

¹¹⁶Kistemaker, 87.

¹¹⁷Martin, 82.

¹¹⁸Richardson, 140.

¹¹⁹Nystrom, 148.

¹²⁰Robertson, 94.

Nystrom agrees, “Both Paul and James see faith as a confidence in God’s saving act along with the effect of that act in the lives of the followers of Jesus Christ.”¹²¹

Now it is clear that, although the English vocabularies look different, the intent of the original sense is the same. Both James and Paul are pointing in the same direction—the salvation or justification of mankind. The idea of works in James speaks of merciful Christian good deeds, and the faith he opposed is a dead faith. Accordingly, the idea of works Paul opposes is the works of the law, not Christians’ good deeds.

It is crucial that one not misunderstand these two theologies, because James’s “works of faith” are not at all what Paul meant by “works of law.”¹²² “Paul in Romans 3:28 is speaking of salvation as a past event; nothing human beings can do can earn God’s forgiveness. But James, when speaking of deeds, has in mind present activity.”¹²³ Here, I believe that James is dealing with the fruit of salvation, while Paul is dealing with how salvation is achieved. Motyer (1985:113) beautifully illustrates the relation between faith and works this way—Faith is a senior partner, and works is a junior partner, both working together. Thus, good works are the fruit of living faith, while dead faith produces only empty words.

Significance for Myanmar’s Evangelical and non-Evangelical Christians in Dialogue

From our study, we learn that there is no theological contradiction between Paul and James, both of them working for the salvation of mankind. The great confusion relative to their theologies came from the erroneous interpretation of “faith” and “works.” Our exegetical work clearly reveals that James is arguing against “a dead faith,” one that lacks potential to motivate a person to do merciful deeds. The works with which James dealt is the fruit of living faith.

In contradiction to James’ idea, Myanmar non-evangelical Christians erroneously understand works to be a means of salvation. As a result, they focus on Christian charities and social endeavors in order to secure their souls’ salvation. They believe that performance of

¹²¹Nystrom, 148.

¹²²Richardson, 128.

¹²³Nystrom, 158.

deeds deserves spiritual blessing.¹²⁴ Doing good deeds in and of itself is not wrong, but trusting good deeds for salvation is totally against God's will. Thus, both James and Paul are opposed to such dead faith and works of the law. Non-evangelical Christians need to move beyond the doing of good works to meet their spiritual needs.

On the other hand, Paul emphasized faith. Although he is not against Christian merciful works, he strongly opposes works that supposedly bring about salvation. Many evangelicals in Myanmar are mistakenly content with their "salvation by faith" and neglect Christian merciful deeds. It is not wrong to be content with our salvation by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; but if people are truly born again and truly a part of God's family, they must intuitively desire to do good works, which James argues is the result of saving, or living, faith. Such faith will produce love, compassion, etc., for others. Therefore, evangelicals should not be confined in their comfort zones, but rather they should step into the world to not only give witness about the love of God, but also exercise Christian deeds as children of God.

In summary, Paul is dealing with justification by faith as essential for the beginning of one's spiritual life, while James is dealing with the importance of Christian deeds as outward demonstrations of being a genuine Christian. Thus, Myanmar non-evangelical Christians need to seek God for a solution first to their spiritual needs, met only by the blood of Jesus; and the evangelicals need to put their faith into action.

Conclusion

Christianity is not a religion that seeks to appease gods by meritorious deeds. In Christianity, we know that God seeks sinners and imputes righteousness (by employing the completed work of Jesus Christ) to anyone who believes in Him. Myanmar Christians should know that there is no other way by which a sinner can be saved. Only faith in Jesus can secure salvation for their souls. Thus, relying on the performance of good deeds for salvation is deceiving oneself, as the non-evangelical Christians do. On the other hand, Christians should not be selfish as some evangelicals are, neglecting the good works God entrusts to us (Ephesians 2:10).

It is important for Myanmar Christians to keep in mind what Nystrom states, "In the New Testament generally, and in Paul in particular, salvation is a threefold experience: it is an accomplished

¹²⁴I often hear people say that they will go to heaven because they are good people and are active both in their church and in charitable activities.

fact: we have been saved (see Ephesians 2:8). It is a present experience: we are being saved (see 1 Corinthians 1:18; Philippians 2:12). It is a future hope: we will be saved (see Roman 13:11; Philippians 3:20).”¹²⁵ With that in mind, the theologies of Paul and James, in terms of faith and works, teach us that we need to have such a saving faith, one that always motivates us as children of God to do Christian deeds to the people around us. We should not only focus on the spiritual needs of people, but also be concerned about merciful deeds to the poor and the needy.

Moo reminds us that, “Paul is attacking people who think that salvation can be earned. James is attacking people who think that salvation brings no responsibility.”¹²⁶ For this reason, Myanmar evangelicals need to move forward to the exercise of their faith in doing Christian charities. At the same time, the non-evangelical Christians need to go beyond doing Christian charities to meet the spiritual needs of the people. Only then will these two groups be able to cooperate in spreading the gospel for the furtherance of the kingdom of God on earth.

¹²⁵Nystrom, 158.

¹²⁶Moo, “James,” 1157.

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