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2016

# Soteriological Specifics in Paul, James, John, and Peter

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ABSTRACT

SOTERIOLOGICAL SPECIFICS  
IN PAUL, JAMES, JOHN, AND PETER

by

Dominik Buchner

Adviser: Laurențiu F. Moț

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: SOTERIOLOGICAL SPECIFICS IN PAUL, JAMES, JOHN, AND PETER

Name of researcher: Dominik Buchner

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Date completed: July 2016

### Topic

The ideas of New Testament authors seem to stand in contradiction to each other: some appear to focus on justification by faith, whereas others seems to proclaim that works need to be performed in order to be saved. It is therefore very difficult to deduce relevant practical implications from the doctrine of salvation because it is often explained in a rather superficial and dissatisfactory way.

### Purpose

The development of the interpretation of the doctrine of salvation is outlined in a chapter about church history. In the following chapter relevant Bible text passages in Paul, James, John, and Peter about the doctrine of salvation are examined carefully.

Because the doctrine of salvation has some practical and theological consequences, the implications of it will be discussed in another chapter before coming to a final conclusion.

### Sources

Throughout each period of time during church history, there appeared to be two groups of scholars and theologians who tried to convince church members of their opinion. One group tried to emphasize righteousness by faith; the other group stressed the importance of deeds (as New Testament authors appear to do also). But this study indicates that Bible authors actually wrote about the same topic from different points of view. They focused on different aspects that contribute to the whole picture. They did not contradict each other.

### Conclusions

A closer study reveals no theological differences among the different writers' points of view and approaches concerning the doctrine of salvation. Some of them tried to focus on justification and sanctification in their correct chronological order, some focused on the truthfulness of faith that presents itself through appropriate works, and others emphasized the importance of both aspects to show that they are inseparable.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

SOTERIOLOGICAL SPECIFICS  
IN PAUL, JAMES, JOHN, AND PETER

A Thesis  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Dominik Buchner

July 2016

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IN PAUL, JAMES, JOHN, AND PETER

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NT New Testament

OT Old Testament

SDA Seventh-day Adventist

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Topic**

When Christians start to believe in the gospel of Jesus, they are often unsure if God accepts them as they are – sinful, corrupt, and needy – or if they have to become a better person first in order to be accepted by God. It takes them a long time to gain a better understanding of this fundamental aspect of biblical theology; at times, they despair because they do not properly understand the relationship between faith and works at all.

Paul's ideas in the Letter to the Romans and to the Galatians seem to stand in contradiction to those in James: one appears to focus on justification by faith, whereas the other seems to proclaim that works need to be performed in order to be saved. A careful study of the problem from different points of view will lead to the result that there are many unnecessary tendencies today which overemphasize either one or the other aspect. This study takes a careful look at the apparent tensions and asks whether they are real or not. If yes, they must be unmasked, repudiated, and criticized. If not, exegesis will prove that these tensions should not be considered as such.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The topic continues to be a highly and fundamentally discussed issue, and many are still not certain about how justification and sanctification go along with each other. It

is even more alarming that representatives of each perception (each one arguing for an extreme position) use Bible verses to substantiate their opinion. Paul and James are played off against each other instead of finding a solution, which accommodates the opinions and interests of both authors. Paul and James are used to depict opposites. It is therefore very difficult to deduce relevant practical implications from such a doctrine because it is often explained in a rather superficial and dissatisfactory way.

### **Importance of the Study**

The topic of justification by faith and its relation to sanctification has been discussed in detail for quite some time. The result of the debate is that the problem mentioned above does not seem to be solved from a biblical perspective, but is used to emphasize contradictions in the Bible. The topic of this study is relevant because scholars should focus more on the Bible when they try to solve the problem.

The approach of this study will lead to conclusions that more or less differ from the classical Protestant or Catholic view. Once the approaches of the different denominations to the doctrine of salvation are examined, considering also their geographical, cultural and religious background, it will turn out that unexpectedly there are strong facets that influence theology. Although this study will also focus on the influential aspects, its goal will rather be to find an answer to the question whether faith and works are truly incompatible. Do Paul, James, and also other New Testament (NT) represent the same kind of theology, or is there a difference between their particular approaches? Is there a need to emphasize the differences between the authors, or does the Bible indicate that there is no reason to limit the authority of one author or another? The

Bible – if understood correctly – might solve the misunderstandings and arguments by itself and might also eliminate extreme approaches to this topic.

The claim of this study is that there is no contradiction between NT authors (such as Paul and James) concerning the topic of justification and sanctification; all NT authors present a consistent theology of righteousness by faith. Far-reaching consequences concerning practical theology, and other related implications, depend specifically on how one explains different NT perspectives on the doctrine of salvation. For that reason, this topic is deeply relevant for every Christian believer. It affects the every-day Christian faith, lifestyle, feelings, and last but not least, the notion that one has of God. Questions like “Am I saved?” or “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” deserve to be answered clearly. If they are not answered satisfactorily, they carry the potential to discourage people and deform the loving relationship between a Christian and God. It results in a relationship of anxiety and sorrow between the two parties. Then, God is no longer a loving God, but a God that has to be feared because of his righteous wrath. A superficial answer to the questions raised above might lead Christians to live their Christian life despondently and apathetically.

Theologians should be very clear about their understanding of salvation, especially when they try to define justification and sanctification. According to the Bible, eternal life or eternal death depends on the approach each human being chooses in regards to this topic. If theologians fail to explain what they mean by their usage of terms like “righteousness by faith”, “salvation”, “justification”, “sanctification”, etc., it may cause an interpretation that is dissociated from the Bible.

## **Delimitations**

The space of this study is delimited: although its topic touches upon other aspects (such as the consistency of the Bible as a complete literary composition), it is not possible to go into every single detail of the related topics. However, the essentials of each will be covered. There may be other issues in which NT authors appear to contradict each other, but only the issue of justification and sanctification will be discussed. Furthermore, there are many passages that deal with the topic of righteousness by faith in depth; yet, not all of them can be examined in this study, and only the more relevant ones will be considered. Also, even though much more could be said when discussing approaches during church history, the focus will be limited to the most relevant scholars throughout the centuries.

## **Keywords**

Particular terms, which were already used in this introduction, will be important throughout the study. That is why some quick definitions need to be given at this point. The usage of the term *justification* or *righteousness by faith* refers to the substitutionary merits of Christ's life and death at the cross that are passed to the sinner as a divine gift. This wondrous exchange of roles is described in Isa 53 and has to be accepted by faith. After they have been justified, sinners are able to stand before the throne of God without sin and righteous because Jesus died for them and carried the penalty at the cross. *Sanctification* describes the important consequences of justification. Sinners do not wish to continue to live according to their sinful standard that they had before their justification. Their lives have changed according to divine principles. However, this should not be understood as a human contribution or condition in order to be saved. It is



part of the salvation process. Sinners are not only saved from sins from the past (justification), but also from sins in their every-day lives (sanctification).

### **Methodology**

At the beginning of this study, it will be helpful to examine some of the church history and approaches of theologians of early Christianity. The opinions of the more important church fathers, the mainstream of the Roman Catholic Church up to the medieval times, the change of thought during the time of the reformers and their followers, and the opinions of some theologians after the reformation will be outlined. After the historical examination, the relevant text passages will be examined carefully. They indicate that Bible authors wrote about the same topic from different points of view, but focused on different aspects that contribute to the whole picture. However, they do not represent different theologies, cultural backgrounds, or religious groups. It is necessary for this examination to use exegetical methods such as lexical studies or contextualization. Not only are they needed to avoid any interpretation of the relevant passages according to popular presuppositions, but they also help staying close to the biblical text and discovering the message which the author originally intended to convey. It will also be possible then to prove the real meaning of theological terms like “justification”, “sanctification” etc., and to show how they have to be defined biblically - not only by means of the reformers’ tradition or any other theologian of the past or present. Because justification and sanctification have some practical and theological consequences, the implications of it will be discussed before coming to a final conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL EXAMINATION

The discussion about the importance of justification and sanctification goes back to the roots of the Christian church, which separated from Judaism in the first century after Christ. Since that time, the questions that many theologians began to search answers for were the following: what obligations do saved people have towards Christ who redeemed them through his death on the cross? Was the Mosaic Law, which was given at Mount Sinai right after the people had left Egypt, set aside partially or completely by the substitutionary death of Christ? Is this law still valid and has to be kept completely, or at just partially? Even though the questions are not always enunciated in exactly this manner, this is the heart of the matter that Christians are struggling with again and again.

As church history will be retraced, the doctrine of justification by faith and its relationship to sanctification will be discussed, and two main positions will be identified that were present during each period of time: those who emphasized justification by faith (but did not necessarily reject sanctification) because they recognized that they were not capable of keeping the Law of God, and those who did not necessarily reject justification by faith, but who feared that it could eliminate the doctrine of sanctification completely.

#### **The Early Christian Church**

When the Christian church separated from Judaism, a critical tension appeared. Christianity had started in Jerusalem with the disciples and those who had been converted

by them. However, the gospel of Jesus had not only spread among the Jews, but also among gentiles. Jewish people had to disconnect from their Jewish identity, while different pagan identities had to distance themselves from their pagan culture. They were all mixed up in one collective Christian church, whose head was the monotheistic and formerly Hebrew God JHWH, who was called “Father” because Jesus had done the same (e.g. Mt 6:9). The same God is represented by the second person of the threefold Godhead: the resurrected Jesus Christ whom the Jews had rejected. Christians who originated from the Jews were called Jewish-Christians, while others originated from the gentiles. In this context, particular questions emerged: how much Judaism had to be assimilated within the Christian church in general? Which of the Jewish laws should the Christian church keep? Questions also arose on behalf of the gentile Christians: how much of their legal obligations should the Jews be willing to leave out?

There was a huge debate about the issue of circumcision in early Christianity. Some of those Christians who were of Jewish background were concerned about the observance of ritual laws. Circumcision distinguished Judaism from paganism with all its declined characteristics. That is why Jewish Christians wanted pagans to be circumcised also – in order to express that they had finally renounced their profane rites. They feared that if circumcision was abolished, Christianity would be influenced by gentile idolatry and immorality, and – even worse – Judaism would lose its preferred status as a salutary church. Obedience to the Torah – the five books of Moses – with *all* its commandments and orders would prevent the Christian church from decline.

The apostles seemed to adopt another attitude. In Acts 15, the reader is informed that Paul and James were both present at the Jerusalem Council. James seemed to be the

chairman of the meeting, since he was also the “leading elder of the Jerusalem church.”<sup>1</sup> He needed to be informed about important things that were happening (Acts 12:17) and was generally accepted as one of the church’s pillars (Gal 2:9). At this council, the leaders of the early Christian church decided that circumcision was not obligatory for the gentiles. James not only led the committee but also consented and formulated the requirement of the council toward the gentiles.<sup>2</sup> He built his argument on the statement of Peter, which refers to salvation through Jesus (Acts 15:11). He literally stated that none of “those of the Gentiles who turn to God” should be troubled, but they should be exhorted “to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.” (15:19-20).<sup>3</sup> If James did not hold the same opinion as the other church pillars, including Paul, concerning the topic of salvation, then why do we not read anything about a conflict among the leaders in Acts 15? Why did he not insist on the ongoing validity of circumcision, but enabled a decree that was completely contrary to his concept instead? Since these questions cannot be answered, we should conclude that James was in harmony with the other apostles and did not oppose their understanding of salvation.

Some theologians doubt that James, whom the Bible talks about in Acts 15 and who was the brother of Jesus, also wrote the letter of James at the end of the NT.<sup>4</sup> Even so, the fact that the church fathers seemed to accept that the brother of Jesus and the

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<sup>1</sup> Todd D. Baker, *Exodus from Rome: A Biblical and Historical Critique*, vol. 1 (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse LLC, 2014), 25.

<sup>2</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 690–691.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version® (ESV®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway.

<sup>4</sup> Archibald M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 168–171.

author of the Letter of James were the same person,<sup>5</sup> according to Mark A. Powell the author of the Letter of James:

was familiar with Jewish wisdom literature, and James, leading the church in Jerusalem, could easily have become immersed in the wisdom tradition. The author of this letter also evinces knowledge of “Jesus sayings,” and obviously, the brother of Jesus would have had firsthand knowledge of things that Jesus taught and said. In addition, the letter’s sensitivity to the poor and its emphasis on economic equality (1:9–11; 2:1–7; 5:1–6) fit well with what is said elsewhere about James (Gal. 2:10) and the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–37; 5:1–11; 6:1). In a broader sense, many references in this letter are said to be suggestive of Palestinian conditions: the mention of early and late rain (5:7) is appropriate for the climate, the references to figs and olives and grapes (3:12) match the produce, and the descriptions of economic exploitation (2:5–7; 5:1–6) match what is known of inequities in the land during this time period.<sup>6</sup>

Acts 15 gives the impression that the command, which was the result of the Jerusalem council, was dispensed with no discrepancy within the church leadership. However, after the Jerusalem Council, Jewish Christians struggled with it.<sup>7</sup> They were trying to convince those who were not of the Jewish party to circumcise, and they even entrapped Peter, who had also been present at the Jerusalem Council and had agreed on the command (Gal 2:11–14). Even if Peter made mistakes, and even if there seemed to be some members of the Jerusalem church who were led by James and did not accept the command, these events were probably exceptions. It should be mentioned that the actions

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<sup>5</sup> Origen, Eusebius. See David Malick, “An Introduction to the Book of James” (Bible.org, n.d.), accessed October 5, 2015, [https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-james#\\_ftn3](https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-james#_ftn3).

<sup>6</sup> Mark A. Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 445–446. See also Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 39–42 and Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 62.

<sup>7</sup> The Letter to the Galatians indicates this. As representatives of the Northern Galatian Theory suggest, it is more logical to believe Gal 2:2 happened sometime during Paul’s attendance of the apostolic council, after he had visited Arabia, the northern and southern Galatian churches, and two times Jerusalem during a time period of 17 years (see Gal 1:18; 2:1). After the event of Acts 15, Paul actually visited the people that he later sent his letter to (Acts 16:6). Representatives of the Southern Galatian Theory have problems to explain how Paul could have travelled so far within only three years – they say that Gal 2:2 happened after another 14 years (2:1) and after the apostolic council in Acts 15.

of those “from James” (Gal 2:12) do not necessarily imply that James was one of them and supported their opinions.<sup>8</sup> Gal 2 and Acts 15 clearly indicate that there were different opinions in the early church, but these were most likely not caused by its leaders. If church leaders did not cause them, and if church leadership (including James) actually tried to eliminate conflicts concerning circumcision in the early church, then James’ opinion most likely did not differ from the one Paul expressed in his letters. Consequently, his letter has to be interpreted in a harmonizing manner.

### **Paradigm Shift During Medieval Times**

During the process of the canonization of the New Testament (NT), there was a vast discussion about the Epistle of James. The apparent contradiction between Paul’s epistles and James’ letter caused misunderstandings and arguments among the leaders of the Christian church. Eventually, the Letter of James was accepted as an essential part of the NT canon.

During the following centuries, the church adopted a more legalistic approach again. Some scholars say that the Jewish Christian point of view, which was represented by James, triumphed over the Pauline perspective because Paul’s theology was not understood during his time.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, there was no one who followed Paul’s opinion and continued to proclaim the gospel according to Paul’s point of view. The result was that, although faith was still an important element of the theology of the church fathers, they were rather heirs of James’ approach. Except for the latter assumption that

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<sup>8</sup> This opinion is represented by Jacob Neusner, “What, Exactly, Is Israel’s Gentile Problem? Rabbinic Perspectives in Galatians 2,” in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tension in Early Christianity*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 115 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 275–306.

<sup>9</sup> Vittorio Subilia, *Die Rechtfertigung aus Glauben: Gestalt und Wirkung vom Neuen Testament bis heute* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 45.

James caused these problems, it was likely the case that the establishment of the catechumenate (e.g. in the shape of the *Didache*):

became the basic structure the church used to transition seekers or converts (and it was probably both) from paganism to Christianity. It functioned as the novitiate of the early Christian period, exposing people to the costs as well as the benefits of church membership. The special meaning of the term and the use of athletic metaphors to describe its seriousness only underscore the vigorous training that converts had to undergo before baptism made them official members of the church.<sup>10</sup>

The costs and benefits of church membership were connected to what a person performed. They were less connected to Jesus Christ even if nobody had abolished the teaching of the saving Messiah. In that sense, the Christian church “borrowed and adapted the language of Roman athletic competition to reinforce the importance of readiness, training, and rigor.”<sup>11</sup> This idea probably became an extreme position.

At the same time, there were many pagan Christians who did not want to refrain from their pagan practices, especially at the time of Constantine the Great. The fact that Constantine changed the day of rest from Sabbath to Sunday,<sup>12</sup> and spiritual leaders tolerated that Christian church members continued to live according to their pagan tradition, illustrates this situation very well.<sup>13</sup> Those church members also continued to attend pagan feasts and rituals that were related to their pagan religion. Their cult was strongly associated with angry and revengeful gods, which had to be satisfied by good

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald L. Sittser, “The Catechumenate and the Rise of Christianity,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 6, no. 2 (2013): 191.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>12</sup> Klaus M. Girardet, “Vom Sonnen-Tag zum Sonntag. Der *Dies Solis* in Gesetzgebung und Politik Konstantins d. Gr.,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 11, no. 2 (2007): 279–310.

<sup>13</sup> Karen Piepenbrink, “Der christliche Identitätsdiskurs im spätantiken Römischen Reich: griechischer Osten und lateinischer Westen in komparatistischer Perspektive,” *Millenium*, no. 12 (2015): 81.

deeds and sacrifices. Therefore, the development of the Roman Catholic Church until medieval times was not only influenced by Jewish Christians, but also by pagan tradition.

This influence can already be seen in the theology of Irenaeus (2<sup>nd</sup> century). He claimed that salvation does not so much occur through the cross but through Jesus' incarnate life without sin that enables sinners to live according to his example. The emphasis on Jesus' perfect life caused a slight change: Irenaeus subtly established the idea that from now on the performance of works would be a condition if one wanted to be saved. Because Jesus had become flesh, followers of Christ were expected to become like Jesus. If it was not possible, salvation could not happen.<sup>14</sup> By establishing a theory about *satisfactio*, Tertullian (2<sup>nd</sup> century) laid the foundation for classical Catholicism: repentance, tears, fasting, prayers and almsgiving appear to be fundamental from then on.<sup>15</sup> Athanasius (3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century) thought that sinners could live without sin and become partially divine in the end. Legalistic theology was mingled with the gospel, and its increasing influence set about the Christian church.<sup>16</sup>

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, two theologians were involved in a central conflict within the church. Pelagius rejected the idea of original sin and believed therefore that humanity was not completely fallen but, by God's grace, was capable of keeping the Law of God. People who were bad examples (in his opinion) were the reason why saved people sinned at times.<sup>17</sup> Righteousness of God "is to be taken to refer to the righteousness which God gives to humans in Christ *as their example*, through the free

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<sup>14</sup> This slight change seems to appear very often in Irenaeus' writings, e.g. in Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers 1 (Ex Fontibus Co., 2015), 354.

<sup>15</sup> Tertullian, "On Repentance," accessed August 3, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0320.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the Word," accessed August 3, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2802.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> Pelagius, "On Free Will" quoted in Augustine, "On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin (Book II)," accessed August 3, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15062.htm>.



and autonomous exercise of *liberum arbitrium*.<sup>18</sup> Pelagius' opponent was Augustine, who held the opinion that human beings are born in sin and therefore were not capable of overcoming sin completely. Nevertheless, according to Augustine's view, sins would always be forgiven if a sinner came to Jesus and wanted to be saved. Augustine refers to numerous statements of Pelagius in *On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin (Book II)* in order to show his strong disagreement with him. Eventually, the dispute led to the condemnation of Pelagius at the 15<sup>th</sup> Council of Carthage. Even though the Augustinian perspective seemed to gain ground, the development in the following centuries indicates that the influence of legalism became much greater. Some scholars see legalistic tendencies even in the theology of Augustine.<sup>19</sup> Those scholars probably misunderstand him because he never wanted to lessen the importance of justification by faith but rather emphasize faith, which performs works of love. This is the point that Augustine wanted to make in his work *De fide et operibus*.<sup>20</sup>

In Medieval times, Anselm (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century), archbishop of Canterbury, and Peter Abelard, a French philosopher, represented two different positions once more: Anselm believed that only Jesus, with his fully human and fully divine nature, could satisfy the demand of God.<sup>21</sup> Abelard rejected his theory and emphasized instead that God's gift has to cause love in the sinner's heart, and this love expresses itself through deeds. The latter part is the atonement in Abelard's opinion.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Allister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 74.

<sup>19</sup> Subilia, *Die Rechtfertigung aus Glauben...*, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Finbarr G. Clancy, Allan Fitzgerald, and John C. Cavadini, "Fide et Operibus, De," *Augustine through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo, or Why God Was Made Man* (Oxford: Henry and Parker, 1865), 65–66.

<sup>22</sup> Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 218, 246.

After this conflict, Dominicans and Franciscans represented the theology of the church until the time of the Reformation. One of the most important Franciscans, Thomas Aquinas, established four principals that express how justification takes place according to him (and others during this time): (1) Grace establishes a new *habitus* that influences sinners to act according to the laws and principles of God. (2) The free will of each individual being starts to move towards God, which (3) leads to becoming alienated from sin. The last step (4) actually completes the process of “the forgiveness of sins”.<sup>23</sup> During this time, according to clerics like Thomas Aquinas, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving could repair the fall of humankind. This approach indicates that sins could not be forgiven if the sinner had not tried to refrain from sinful deeds before and had been successful somehow.

When monasticism began to increase, a contrary movement came into existence: the Waldensians, who also seemed to have highly been influenced by the Roman Church. They separated from the church and looked for relevant criteria concerning spiritual life in the Bible. They rejected many practices of the church to preserve “the beliefs and practices of the primitive church in their remote mountain settlements.”<sup>24</sup> But nevertheless, they continued to be rather legalistic until the reformers began to minister. Then their understanding of salvation changed. Although they did not adopt everything that the reformers taught, some aspects of their understanding of justification by faith were accepted. They realized that the reformers’ understanding of this issue was consistent with the biblical revelation, which they honored deeply.

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<sup>23</sup> Subilia, *Die Rechtfertigung aus Glauben...*, 58–59.

<sup>24</sup> Michael W. Homer, “Seeking Primitive Christianity in the Waldensian Valleys: Protestants, Mormons, Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses in Italy,” *Nova religio* 9, no. 4 (May 2006): 6.

## The Time of the Reformation

Martin Luther, strongly influenced by Augustine, set the foundation for the Protestant movement, which reconsidered the Catholic approach to justification. He looked for a graceful God whose wrath would not just punish sinners for their transgression. It was his personal experience that no one – even himself: a humble and surrendered monk – would be able to live perfectly according to the divine standards. He (and also other reformers) reexamined practices like the selling of indulgences, the general role of the church concerning forgiveness of sins, and an individual's contribution to justification. As a result, he proclaimed the free gift of salvation without any personal obligation. His ministry caused tremendous arguments that were accompanied by violence and led to the Council of Trent in 1547. During this council, the claim of the Roman Catholic church became clear because its position was contrasted with the opinion of the reformers: if people avoided becoming a member of this one and only church, they would be condemned.<sup>25</sup> Luther's tendency to lift up justification by faith above everything else led him to even deny the validity of the Epistle of James, which, in his opinion, seemed to deliver a legalistic message.

His position led many to believe the Old Testament (OT) and the Law was no longer as important as before the death of Christ. He somehow expressed himself unclearly when he wrote about James, and the little significance of deeds in his theology sometimes led others to actually reject the OT completely. It is likely that he himself probably never wanted people to come to such an absolute conclusion.

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<sup>25</sup> Gerhard Sauter, "Zur Einführung," in *Rechtfertigung als Grundbegriff evangelischer Theologie*, Theologische Bücherei 78 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1989), 18–22.

“He [the believer] does not truly believe, if works of love do not follow faith. [...] It is true that faith alone justifies without works. But I am talking about true faith, which, after it has justified, does not snore idle, but is diligent through love.”<sup>26</sup> This seems to be a very balanced point of view. Where did Luther see the problem? When he read the Epistle of James, he was probably bothered by the Greek term that is used in chapter 2 – δικαιοῶ. He did not understand how James could use this word if it is faith that sets the foundation for justification. Works should be absolutely excluded from the topic of justification. In other words: Luther held the position that works do not save sinners, but they are the result of justification by faith. In his opinion, the Epistle of James did not fit to the NT message, which Paul and others represent, and that is why Luther rejected it. The fact that the ancient church was sure about the importance and relevance of James, and that he “mentions Christ a few times but does not teach anything about him but instead talks about general faith in God,”<sup>27</sup> caused him to doubt and made him separate the epistle from the rest of the NT:

But James does nothing else than pushing to the Law and its works and mingles disorderly one with the other so that I think that he was a good and faithful man that got many sayings of the apostolic disciples and wrote them down. He calls the Law a law of freedom, while St. Paul calls it a law of bondage, wrath, death, and sin. [...] He wanted to defend those who rely on faith without works [...] wants to justify with the Law, while

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<sup>26</sup> Original text: “Vere autem non credit, si opera Charitatis fidem non sequuntur. [...] Verum est sine operibus solam fidem iustificare, Sed de fide vera loquor, quae, postquam iustificaverit, non stertet ociosa, Sed est per Charitatem operosa.” Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, vol. 40 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1914), 36–37.

<sup>27</sup> Analogous translation by Timothy J. Wengert, “Building on the One Foundation with Straw: Martin Luther and the Epistle of James,” *Word & World* 35, no. 3 (2015): 260. Original: “Er nennet Christum etlich mal, aber er leret nicht von jm, sondern sagt von gemeinem glauben an Gott.” Martin Luther, *Die Gantze Heilige Schrift Deudsch*, ed. Hans Volz, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (München: Rogner & Bernhard, 1973), 2455.

the apostles want to justify with works of love. Therefore I cannot put him among the main books.<sup>28</sup>

This position led to many misunderstandings; other reformers or groups differed from Luther in this matter, or at least tried to express themselves more carefully. Luther saw justification chronologically before sanctification, whereas sanctification never contributes anything to justification. John Calvin classified justification and sanctification as occurring at the same time because they are both present in Jesus. However, he also believed that one could only be saved by faith! The presence of Jesus in his teachings assured everyone that Christ remained the center of his approach, but this interpretation was Calvin's reaction to a more liberal influence that had resulted from Luther's understanding of justification and sanctification.<sup>29</sup> Both reformers believed that Rom 7 is part of the Christian's experience, but while Calvin believed that the struggle of chapter 7 is a parallel experience of what is described in chapter 8 (and that chapter 8 should be emphasized much more than chapter 7), Luther was convinced that the experience of chapter 7 could be overcome by the good news of chapter 8.

The Anabaptists, the pietistic movement, and John Wesley, who laid the foundation for the Methodist church, both stood for a rather strict approach concerning sanctification. It is often said that their point of view and the one of the reformers are highly contradictory because they claimed that every Christian is obligated to keep the law and live a perfect and sinless life. Concerning the Anabaptists, it has to be admitted

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<sup>28</sup> Original text: "Aber dieser Jacobus thut nicht mehr denn treibet zu dem Gesetz vnd seinen wercken vnd wirfft so vnördig eins ins ander, das mich düncket es sey jrgend ein gut frum Man gewesen der etliche Sprüche von der Aposteln Jünger gefasset vnd also auffs Papir geworffen hat. [...] Er nennet das Gesetz ein gesetz der freiheit, so es doch S. Paulus ein gesetz der knechtschaft, des zorns, des tods vnd der sünde nennet. [...] Er hat wollen denen wehren, die auff den glauben on wreck sich verliessen [...] wil es mit dem Gesetz treiben ausrichten, das die Apostel mit reitzen zur Liebe ausrichten. Darumb kan ich jn nicht vnter die rechten Heubtbücher setzen..." Luther, *Die Gantze Heilige Schrift Deudsch*, 2:2454.

<sup>29</sup> Subilia, *Die Rechtfertigung aus Glauben...*, 217–220.

that Luther did not support them, but Calvin did.<sup>30</sup> Some scholars believe that Luther did not know very much about the Anabaptists. Luther generally did not like the Anabaptist movement, and the disagreement between both parties might have been caused by personal issues rather than by the topic of justification and sanctification.<sup>31</sup> There were a few conflicts about the practical implications of Luther's *theologia crucis*. The Anabaptists did not agree on his opinion that God, as Luther claimed, might be found in his opposite characteristics, and that, even if converted people do not perform any deeds, they might be converted in their hearts. His theology seemed obscure and rather philosophical than biblical. However, the Anabaptists accepted Luther's doctrine of justification by faith,<sup>32</sup> but Luther did not give them the opportunity to discuss theological aspects that differed from his approach.

Concerning Wesley, it should be noted that scholars still argue about Wesley's point of view in regard to perfection. Some contemporary Wesleyan authors do not admit that he proclaimed perfectionism and that sinners needed to reach perfection as other scholars oftentimes claim.<sup>33</sup> It is true that Wesley did not like Luther's theology. But these Wesleyan theologians claim that his opinion was formed by hearsay. If he had known him better, this might have changed his opinion about Luther in some respects. In other words, it was not Wesley's intention to oppose Luther by attacking his position on justification and sanctification. Actually, their ideas might not even have differed that much on this subject. Whatever Wesley's point of view was, a strong tendency to

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<sup>30</sup> Subilia, *Die Rechtfertigung aus Glauben...*, 244–245.

<sup>31</sup> Ugo Gastaldi, *Storia Dell'anabattismo Dalle Origini a Münster 1525-1535*, vol. 1 (Turin, 1972), 432.

<sup>32</sup> John M. Fowler, "Sin," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 261.

<sup>33</sup> Mark K. Olson, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Sin Revisited," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 47, no. 2 (2012): 70–71.

perfectionism could be traced within the Methodist church, and Wesley must be held responsible for that – at least to a certain degree.

### **The Age of Enlightenment until Today**

Today's theologians like to analyze church history and try to explain where all these tensions in the past came from. The Lutheran point of view is the most common approach to this topic. The Age of Enlightenment marked the beginning of the historical-critical method, which was used as a tool to explain the contradictions between NT writers from then on. It became an important instrument of Protestant theologians to defend Luther's perspective (but Luther himself would probably not have gone that far). Nevertheless, there continued to be many scholars who thought, and still think, that it is likely that Paul and James do not contradict, but complement one another. The interpretation and understanding of Paul's and James' actual position concerning justification and sanctification was based on the answer to this decisive question from now on: is the historical-critical method the preferable way to develop a theology from the Bible, or should the consistency of the Bible be put first?

Especially Luther responded to justification by works: he added salvation by faith alone. In the 1980s, this point of view became known as the *Old Perspective on Paul*. Opposed to such an understanding is the *New Perspective on Paul*.<sup>34</sup> It is influenced by the concept of Ed P. Sanders who questions whether Paul understood the Judaism of the 1<sup>st</sup> century the same way as many other Christian theologians, who were influenced by Luther, understand it today. He claims that Paul did not reject the Jews' approach to

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<sup>34</sup> The New Perspective on Paul provides an interesting approach concerning the role of the law. One must not necessarily agree with each single claim of this perspective (e.g. the statement that the Jews actually believed in justification by faith), but it is interesting that the law, according to its approach, is there for a special reason even in NT times.

salvation by faith (because they actually agreed on that), but fought against the reestablishment of rituals that were related to the Jewish temple, such as circumcision, food laws etc. (which James D. G. Dunn later called *Works of Law*).<sup>35</sup> It is this foundation upon which Dunn builds his New Perspective on Paul. He claims that Paul had criticized that, for a long time, the law had been separating Israel from other nations. By doing that, it had not fulfilled the law's actual sense. He wanted this barrier to be overcome.<sup>36</sup> N.T. Wright develops this idea a little bit further and states that, as a part of Israel's covenantal responsibility, the people should have been the light for other nations. Because of its disobedience, Israel had failed to fulfill this aim. With Jesus, the blessing of the covenant could finally reach the pagan nations. Wright's perspective is that righteousness is not about how one might become a Christian. Rather, it is about whether someone belongs to God's people. The law helps everyone to find out whether someone belongs to the chosen ones or not.<sup>37</sup>

Some ideas, held by representatives of the New Perspective on Paul, seemed to be incorporated by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church long before the 1980s. Many Millerites, the precursors of the Adventist church, converted from the Methodist church and were very concerned about perfection. They understood the Law of God and other typical Adventist doctrines as touchstones to identify those who will be saved or condemned. Justification by faith was a rarely discussed topic in general at the beginning of the SDA church. At the General Conference session of the church in Minneapolis in 1888, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones began to strongly emphasize the doctrine of

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<sup>35</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 5–6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob Thiessen, "Kritische Einführung in die Theologie der Neuen Paulusperspektive und von N. T. Wright," 2013, 7–11, accessed May 16, 2016, <http://www.sthbasel.ch/download/gaiOMacw08c/Neue%20Paulusperspektive%20und%20N.%20T.%20Wright.pdf>.



righteousness by faith, but many SDA members did not agree with them at that time. Ellen G. White, one of the most important leaders of the church, underlined the importance of this doctrine and got the chance to present her point of view at that General Conference session. It took many years to establish the doctrine completely as fundamental among church members. Through White's strong support, the new teaching was finally accepted completely.<sup>38</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Throughout each period of time during church history, there appeared to be two groups of scholars and theologians who tried to convince church members of their opinion. One group tried to emphasize righteousness by faith; the other group stressed the importance of deeds. Of course there were also smaller aspects in which scholars (as Luther and Calvin) differed from each other, but the groups mentioned above were the main representatives of the opinions that people held – and hold to this day. It should also be noted that almost none of the relevant scholars completely rejected the opposed position, but they merely wanted to emphasize what they personally considered as important.

Furthermore, there have always been religious groups who tried to find a balanced position between the opinions mentioned above. The Waldensians, the Anabaptists, and possibly also the pietistic movement, and John Wesley were very concerned about the validity of certain parts of the Bible, but they also adopted the opinions of others if they did not contradict the biblical teachings.

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<sup>38</sup> C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-Day Adventists* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1977), 235, 245–246.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

This chapter will now focus on the more important Bible passages that are relevant for a clear understanding of the doctrine of salvation. While the theological aspects will be examined more closely, the reasons for the already mentioned apparent problems will show up evidently. Since Paul and James seem to talk about the topic merely from a different perspective and with another intention, the contradictions and their reasons will be explained. In addition, ways that harmonize different points of view will be presented. By asking the following questions, similarities will be compared, discrepancies (if any) between the writers will be highlighted, and everything will be put in a coherent picture: (1) How is the law defined? (2) What is salvation, how does it work, and who is involved in it? (3) What status and practical relevance does salvation imply for the faithful?

The last question is the most challenging one because the whole debate about possible contradictions originates in practical questions that are posed by individual believers: Am I already saved and consequently cannot be lost anymore? Once saved – always saved? Do I have to perform works in order to complete the salvation that was provided by the substitutionary death of Jesus at the cross? What if moral orders and obligations become neglected because of a possible overemphasis on the doctrine of justification by faith?

In addition to Paul and James, it will also be touched upon what other NT writers (John and Peter) wrote concerning the topic of justification. Since this study is also about the consistency concerning the doctrine of justification by faith of other NT writers, this information should be considered just as important. The writings of James and John might help us to get further insights about the doctrine of salvation in the NT.

### **Definition of the Law**

How do NT authors define the law (νόμος)? It is necessary to answer this question at the beginning of this theological chapter because salvation only happens if there is a need for it. Salvation became necessary at the very moment when creation succumbed sin. But how could creation or humanity have known about the definition of sin? Sin had to be defined by a law that described the principles of righteousness and everything that was contrary to those principles became sin from the moment of its establishment. When NT authors write about salvation, they often write about the law as well (without always defining what they mean when they use this term), or works that are connected with the law. The reader seems to be expected to have an understanding of the term each time it is used. If Paul applies a different interpretation to the term than James or other authors, this might explain an apparent inconsistency.

First of all, it should be noticed that there are mainly two different kinds of laws in the Bible that are introduced and included in the Torah (or Pentateuch).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The subdivision into two categories, as it is presented here, is suggested by Heinz Schaidinger, “Was wurde aufgehoben?,” accessed June 14, 2016, [http://www.bibelschule.info/streaming/Heinz-Schaidinger---26.-Was-wurde-aufgehoben\\_20227.pdf](http://www.bibelschule.info/streaming/Heinz-Schaidinger---26.-Was-wurde-aufgehoben_20227.pdf). His perception was chosen for this study because it is the easiest model to subdivide the Mosaic Law, even though it is not the only one. There are also other subdivisions that e.g. suggest four types of law categories and thereby indicate a more detailed model: moral, ceremonial, civil, and dietary. Since we will be dealing mostly with the Moral Law, the subdivision of the Mosaic Law does not concern us too much here. The umbrella term “ceremonial” will merely help us

(1) The *Ceremonial Law*, which contains the civil laws (Deut 20-25), dietary laws (Lev 11-15), and everything that has to do with the Israelite cult: sanctuary (e.g. Ex 35:30-36:38; Lev 8:10), sacrifices (e.g. Lev 1-7), priesthood (e.g. Lev 8:1-12; 13:9-17) etc. Due to its extent, it is not only confined to ceremonial regulations. The umbrella term *ceremonial* is rather incomplete and does not do justice to what it actually describes. It is especially related to the OT and its covenant with the people of Israel (e.g. Ex 24; 34; Heb 9:1-5) and points to the topic of salvation in the NT, which is sometimes equated with the New Covenant (e.g. Jer 31:31-24; Heb 9:1-28). Through Jesus, Christians are not obliged to keep some of the regulations of the Ceremonial Law any longer (e.g. offerings: Heb 10:9-18; priests: Heb 7:11-19; 8:1-2; ceremonial feasts: Col 2:16-17; circumcision: Gal 5:2-6). In regards to the topic of salvation, NT authors refer to the Ceremonial Law only to help the reader understand the matter of salvation (e.g. Eph 2:13-15; Heb 7:11-19). Its many symbols clearly point to the sacrifice of Jesus, the slaughtered lamb on the cross (e.g. Isa 53; Heb 9:23-28). It should be noted that the other aspects of the Ceremonial Law continued to be valid even in the Christian era and were also respected by Christians (civil law at least until 70 AD; dietary laws were never abolished: Acts 15:29).

(2) The second type of law that the Torah presents is the *Moral Law*. It includes the moral standards of God, which are eternally valid (e.g. Ps 111:7-8; Jam 2:10-12). When NT authors write about salvation in connection to the law, they usually mean the Moral Law (e.g. Rom 7:1-6; 1 Cor 7:19). It includes the Ten Commandments (Decalogue; Ex 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21), which should be interpreted as a code of

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from this moment on to focus on the moral aspect of the law, which is much more important for a correct understanding of the doctrine of salvation.

principles: each commandment contains and demands more than just wording and should not only be kept literally as Jesus explains in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g. Mt 5:21-30).<sup>2</sup> It is a description of God's character,<sup>3</sup> a measurement for sinful (or sinless) creatures in the judgment that identifies sin and condemns the transgressor (e.g. Jam 2:12).

We will now turn to the most relevant authors of the NT epistles and carve out their theological approaches to the law and the importance of it.

### Paul

The exact meaning of νόμος or ἐντολή (single commandment of the complete νόμος) has to be identified anew in each text passage in Pauline writings. Paul generally seems to refer to the moral section of the Torah when he uses νόμος or ἐντολή. If one ascribes the authorship of the Letter to the Hebrews to Paul, this letter would be the only exception. (9:19-20; 11:22)

Paul's understanding of the term νόμος can probably be explained by focusing on one small and exemplary text passage: Gal 5:1-4. Paul contrasts the freedom through Christ with a yoke of slavery, which he identifies as circumcision in 5:2. In other words: either Christ, or circumcision! If someone still wants to be circumcised, he is obligated to keep the law completely (not only its ceremonial, but also its moral part) because circumcision represents independence from the forgiveness of sins provided through Christ. A person that values the importance of circumcision continues to rely on righteousness by works. Such an understanding had to be considered as harmful as

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<sup>2</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes how a correct interpretation of the Moral Law should look like. The Moral Law is an expression of love to God and other human beings (Mt 22:35-40).

<sup>3</sup> Ivan T. Blazen, "Salvation," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 460–461.

paganism and “could be lumped together under the rubric ‘the basic principles of the world’ [...] and so a leaving of Christian principles for either one or the other was a renunciation of freedom and a return ‘again’ to slavery.”<sup>4</sup> Paul already understood the danger of Judaism and paganism, and their influence on Christianity. Church history confirms that his concerns were reasonable (as demonstrated in the previous chapter). But true faith in Jesus rids itself entirely of this attempt and focuses only on Jesus and his sinless merits in order to be saved. The law continues to lead sinners to Christ, and sinners realize their sinfulness by meditating on the law; however, they are not obliged to it in order to be saved - in that sense the law has been abolished!

But another, less common interpretation of the text says that Paul, by mentioning circumcision, was writing about the Ceremonial Law.<sup>5</sup> It is obligatory to be kept by the person that insists on being circumcised instead of putting the faith in Jesus. The consequence of such an interpretation for texts like Gal 5:1-4 is that there is no need to talk about an “abolishment” of the Moral Law; only parts of the Ceremonial Law of the Torah have been abolished and the moral part continues to be valid.

Which of these interpretations should be preferred? Is the abolishment of the complete Torah (and therefore also its moral part) a reliable opportunity to be saved? Or is it the abolishment of only the ceremonial part of the Torah because Jesus and his sinless merits have substituted it? White wrote: “I am asked concerning the law in Galatians. What law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ? I answer: Both the

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<sup>4</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 225.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Papaioannou, “Sabbath, Covenant, Law and Paul,” n.d., 29–31.

ceremonial and the moral code of ten commandments.”<sup>6</sup> Since both interpretations are biblical, and both perspectives can be proved by other text passages in the Bible, Paul probably intended to point out an ambiguous interpretation.

What is the meaning of the law in Paul’s writings? While keeping the complete Ceremonial Law indicates that someone relies rather on his own works than on Jesus Christ, it still helps to understand salvation much better in NT times. The Moral Law is still valid, no matter what people one belongs to or from what ethnic origin they are (Rom 2:13). It is not a reliable source of salvation, but it is the judgment code (6:23; Gal 3:10; 5:3-4). It identifies everybody’s continual sinfulness (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:19), shows that there is nobody without guilt (Rom 3:11,22-23), and that no one can escape the heavenly judgment on its own. How can a sinner be saved if not by obeying the Moral Law? This question leads to Jesus Christ (Gal 2:15-16). The law, which is holy, righteous, good (Rom 7:12), and whose validity is emphasized by salvation (3:31), necessitates salvation. Furthermore, Rom 6 implies that a saved person wants to live a life according to the law, which emphasizes the relevance of it again.

### James

James’ understanding of νόμος is not as ambivalent as Paul’s, but it should only be identified with the moral code. The relevant chapter in the Letter of James, which theologians emphasize when trying to point out inconsistencies between him and Paul, is chapter 2. There, James writes about privileged treatment of people in the church that seem to possess a better position than others in matters of e.g. social status (2:1-9). Such partial behavior is identified as sin and James links it to breaking not only one

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 233.

commandment, but also to the violation of the complete Moral Law (the Ten Commandments, 2:10), which James refers to as the *Royal Law* (2:8).<sup>7</sup>

After linking partiality to the violation of the moral code, he continues to write about the relationship between faith and works (2:14-26). Nowhere in the Letter of James does one find a clue that he dedicated even just a few verses to the Ceremonial Law. If he had referred to the ceremonial part, his explanations about works in 2:14-26 would only make sense if a contradiction or inconsistency between his and Paul's writings was assumed because Paul rejected the validity of the Ceremonial Law in NT times. It seems unlikely that this is the case.

James points out here that the (Moral) Law<sup>8</sup> has the function of a mirror showing sinners who they really are (1:23). In that sense, he wants the law to be understood as a liberator. Acting on this deliverance means putting away wicked behavior (1:21). He proposes another kind of law that he calls the *Law of Liberty* (1:25) and which is of different kind than the Royal Law.<sup>9</sup> This particular usage of the term νόμος is also found in the writings of Paul (e.g. 1 Cor 9:21; Rom 8:2). New Testament writers appear to use this term to describe another law, but it is not used to describe the Moral or Ceremonial Law. That other kind of law, the Law of Liberty, is dealing with the notion of salvation and expresses the same idea as the ceremonial regulations of the Torah. The Moral Law

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<sup>7</sup> James identifies it as royal because he wanted his audience to live out the “kingdom law”, which has “royal or ‘kingly’ authority because it has been articulated by Yahweh’s Messiah.” Joel A. Weaver, “The Heart of the Law: Love Your Neighbor (Jas 2:8-13),” *Review & Expositor* 108, no. 3 (2011): 445–446.

<sup>8</sup> James uses the terms *law* and *word* interchangeable with each other. Richardson, *James*, 97.

<sup>9</sup> Craig A. Evans, *John’s Gospel, Hebrews-Revelation*, The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2005), 22 suggests that both terms – Royal Law (2:8) and Law of Liberty (1:25; 2:12) – refer to the Tora. But: 1:25 and 2:12 emphasize the difference between the Law of Liberty and the law, which is mentioned before each of these verses. Therefore it is unlikely the case that the Law of Liberty refers to the Tora. 2:12-13 ascribes the Law of Liberty the function to judge upon the foundation of grace, which is better than to be judged by the Royal Law. The Royal Law leads to a “judgment without mercy.” However, the Royal Law remains to be the standard of God’s kingdom, but nobody can be saved through it.



seems to be somehow connected with this Law of Liberty; it is called “‘perfect’ in that it participates in the goodness of God and is essential to his gifts bestowed in wisdom to believers.”<sup>10</sup> The standard of judgment is not only the Moral Law, but also “the law that gives freedom. This is a reference to the gospel.”<sup>11</sup> The Law of Liberty can also judge, although it is meant to free sinners:

The law of liberty, through God’s mercy, frees us from the curse of the law, that henceforth we should be free to love and obey willingly. If we will not in turn practice the law of love to our neighbor, that law of grace condemns us still more heavily than the old law, which spake nothing but wrath to him who offended in the least particular (Jam 2:13).<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, James also writes about salvation, but calls it a *Law of Liberty* that should also be obeyed and is even more powerful than the Moral Law. It summarizes the process of justification and sanctification.

Scholars like Subilia<sup>13</sup> see James highly influenced by Judaism because some of James’ church members seemed to strongly emphasize Judaism and Jewish regulations (Gal 2:12). Since he was most likely Jesus’ brother (Gal 1:19), he might have known his brother’s efforts in regards to Judaism and the Jewish leaders very well – maybe even better than other apostles. It is very unlikely that James became a Christian and an important leader of the Jerusalem church while he continued to represent Jewish doctrines the way that these scholars describe it. Interestingly, some scholars see a

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<sup>10</sup> Richardson, *James*, 97.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas D. Lea, *Hebrews, James*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 284.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 488.

<sup>13</sup> Subilia, *Die Rechtfertigung aus Glauben...*, 37–38.

complete absence of Judaism in the writings of James and instead state that it is rather Paul who is connected closely to Judaism.<sup>14</sup>

The presence of Paul, Peter, and James at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 suspends the assumption that James did not agree with the orders that were dispensed at the council and that he shared the same opinion with those people who were identified with him.<sup>15</sup> It might have been only a few of James' church members whose opinion could have differed from James' point of view. Even today, such differences are not unusual.

Therefore, it is suggested that the Bible should be taken as it has been conveyed. This does not only apply to the doctrine of justification by faith! It is a general approach for a correct interpretation of the Bible. Readers should try to solve problems first before assuming that there are inconsistencies. If they do not find a solution for the problem, it is still possible to conclude that there might be an inconsistency, but this decision should not be made prematurely.

### John and Peter

According to John, sin is lawlessness (1 Joh 3:4). This, however, does not mean that keeping the Moral Law and avoiding sin results in salvation. John never states that one should pin their hope on the moral code. Instead, salvation can only happen through Jesus (Joh 3:16; 1 Joh 3:16). The law actually accuses people who try to keep it, but it draws them to Jesus when they realize that they are sinners and cannot overcome sin on

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<sup>14</sup> Wiard Popkes, "Leadership: James, Paul, and Their Contemporary Background," in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tension in Early Christianity*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 115 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 351.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Bauckham, "James, Peter and the Gentiles," in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tension in Early Christianity*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 115 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 140–142.

their own (e.g. 3:18; 1 Joh 3:19-24). In his letters, John connects the law that was given through Moses with love, which came through Jesus (e.g. 1 Joh 2:7-8; 4:19-21):

The Gospel of John indicates that the Jews wanted to drive a wedge between Moses and Jesus, pitting one against the other. Modern readers of John are tempted to do the same, but [...] John writes specifically to counter such an approach. Moses and the νόμος are not the enemies of Jesus; in fact, when used properly, they both point to Christ. Moses did not ascend into heaven, but Jesus Christ has come down from heaven to deliver his people from their bondage to sin by ascending upon the cross. Instead of presenting a tirade against Moses, John's Gospel puts him in his proper, important place.<sup>16</sup>

To this day, people see a tension between the Moral Law and the grace and truth that Jesus established. In his gospel, as well as in his epistles, John tried to eliminate such an approach: to love Jesus means to live according to the law (e.g. Joh 14:15; 1 Joh 2:3-6), which is also indicated in the parable of the branch that only bears fruit if it is connected with the vine (Joh 15:5,8). The law is defined in a special manner in the Gospel of John and also in his letters: it means to love one another, which is a consequence of the love that God has revealed by saving sinners who believe in the name of Jesus (13:34-35; 15:12; 1 Joh 3:23-24). From John's point of view, the Moral Law and its commandments cannot be separated from salvation.

By mentioning the law in his gospel, John might have referred to the "legislation found in the Pentateuch (7:51; 18:31), to the entirety of the Pentateuch (1:45), or to the entire Old Testament (7:19, 7:49, 12:34)."<sup>17</sup> Whatever he actually referred to: even though John knew about the existence of the Ceremonial Law, it is obvious from the

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher A. Maronde, "Moses in the Gospel of John," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2013): 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

context that he rather focused on the moral part of the Torah when he used the terms νόμος or ἐντολή in his writings.

The Gospel of John introduces the topic of salvation in a very interesting way: the parable of light and darkness, which is present throughout the complete work. In the writings of John, light and darkness are key words to understand salvation and the role of the law in the lives of believers. Those who walk in the light are saved and will not be condemned in the judgment while those in the darkness will be condemned.<sup>18</sup> The first chapter introduces it: “In the beginning was the Word, [...] and the Word was God. [...] In him was the life, and the life was the light of men.” (Joh 1:1,4) According to Joh 1:14, Jesus was the word, which became flesh to live among humankind. The Gospel of John defines living in the light as living according to the commandment God has given (3:19-20). John makes it very clear: this can only happen if someone follows Jesus (8:12), loves Jesus (14:15), and is with Jesus (12:35-36). It does not happen if one simply tries to keep the commandments.

Peter, another NT author, writes about ἐντολή only two times in his second letter. (2 Pe 2:21; 3:2) The first verse calls the commandment holy; the second one connects it with Jesus Christ. The context of both verses indicates that Peter exhorts his readers to live according to their knowledge (2:21-22). He states that Christians should be aware of the fact that turning away from the principles, which were stated in the moral part of the Torah, means to be judged and destroyed together with the scoffers eventually (3:3-7). Again, it would make no sense if Peter referred to the ceremonial part in these two verses. The context indicates that he rather focuses on the effect of discipleship, which expresses

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen C. Barton, “Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 12–13.

itself by observing the Moral Law. He only mentions moral aspects, but by no means does he mention any ceremonial issues.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

When Paul, James, John, and Peter mention the terms νόμος or ἐντολή they usually refer to the moral part of the Torah, which is indicated by the context. Because of the substitutionary death of Jesus, the ceremonial part of the Torah plays a minor role in their writings even if it is not completely unimportant to them. In this sense, the law (the Torah, especially the moral part of it) is still valid. This fact is not changed by salvation; instead, salvation seems to uphold the law. Some cultic regulations may be abolished by the death of Christ, but the idea of these ceremonial orders continues to exist through Jesus and his sacrifice. Paul stresses that the law leads sinners to Christ: he forgives them and helps them to live according to its commandments. James emphasizes the law as a measure whether someone is saved. John defines the law as something that is driven by love. From his perspective, the law cannot save but is a test whether someone really loves God. While Paul and James stress either one or the other, he seems to emphasize both aspects. Peter exhorts his readers to stand firm and not to disregard a Christian's responsibility and respect concerning the commandments. None of the four writers, which have just been mentioned, contradicts the other or represents another theology concerning the law.

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<sup>19</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *2Peter, Jude*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 164.

## **Salvation (Justification)**

What is salvation? As we have just seen, NT authors tend to use the terms νόμος or ἐντολή to define moral transgression. The Moral Law with its commandments helps sinners realize that they cannot live according to divine standards. The writers agree with the fact that it will bring judgment over transgressors. It defines what is right and wrong. But according to John, it is also a touchstone if somebody loves God, and Paul stresses that nobody has to keep it in order to be saved. Is this not a contradiction?

This section tries to answer some fundamental questions such as: how should salvation be defined biblically? How does it work, and who is involved in it? Which aspects belong to it? Is salvation only a gift or does the receiver have to add works according to the Moral Law? What are the implications of one answer or the other?

The Bible depicts salvation as a process initiated by God. It was introduced for the first time right after the fall of men in Gen 3:15. Adam and Eve disobeyed the commandment God had given and ate from the forbidden tree (3:1-7). Thereby, they expressed that they did not trust the one who had given the commandment. As their creator, he knew very well what was good for them, but they did not obey him and therefore had to taste their own rebellion against their loving creator. However, the God of the Bible is not comparable to the gods that people have depicted in various myths and legends. His action was not driven by wrath and revenge but was controlled by love. Sinners were not capable to live in the glorious and sinless presence of God any longer, and sin controlled their life (3:24). They were not able to free themselves from its power. The penalty for their transgression was death (Rom 6:23).

Yet God changed the situation of sinful human beings and established the plan of salvation: in order for them to be allowed to live in the presence of God again, they

needed to be exculpated from their sins. This was only possible if someone carried their sins and punishment in their place (Isa 53:4-12). This is exactly what Jesus did on the cross (Phil 2:5-8). Because Jesus' merits became theirs, sinners had now gained the right to live in Jesus' presence again. This is the foundation for the process of salvation and is the warranty for repentant sinners that their sins will be forgiven, and they are already saved.

The discussion now revolves around the question whether salvation only includes the forgiveness of sins or whether salvation also means to discard the old lifestyle and consequently to be freed from future sins?

#### Paul and James

Paul points it out: works cannot save anyone. Only by faith in the merits of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus, salvation can happen (Rom 3:24,26). Jews and gentiles are invited to claim this gift (3:29-30). Paul explains how it happens: Jesus took the sin of the sinner's life away when he died on the cross (Gal 2:20). The old and sinful body of the sinner is crucified with Jesus there, which is illustrated by the symbol of baptism (Rom 6:3-4). Hence, the sinner "dies to the law" and lives under the law of Christ from now on (1 Cor 9:21). There is no need to perform any works of law and to contribute anything to the salvation of sinners. Salvation is a gift of God (Eph 2:8-9) that brings the alienated sinners back to God. It reconciles their body of flesh by Jesus' death in order to present them holy, blameless, and above reproach before God (Col 1:21-22).

If one holds the opinion that Paul is the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, much more could be said about Paul's holistic understanding of salvation. Even if the reader does not agree with Paul's authorship concerning the Letter to the Hebrews, the content

of it still needs to be taken into consideration, and this can be done without accepting his authorship. In Hebrews, Jesus is not just the sacrifice that died on the cross, but he is also the high priest in the heavenly sanctuary in the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:6; 7:17). This notion is almost exclusively mentioned in the Letter to the Hebrews; other NT writings only insinuate it.<sup>20</sup> This means that he was appointed to be a priest, but he was not a typical Aaronic priest. In this function, he was a mediator between God and sinners to enable them to come to God: through his bloody sacrifice (9:12-14; 10:19-23) and through his priestly mediation. It makes him our advocate who completely understands the circumstances that sinners have to go through (2:14-18; 4:14-5:10). The Letter to the Hebrews explains that salvation does not only take place on the cross: there has to be a mediator who sets the foundation for communication between God and the believers in the judgment. The foundation for mediation was laid at the cross, which continues to be the center of salvation. But the process of salvation will actually be finished as soon as the judgment is closed with Jesus' mediation. There could be no better mediator than Jesus because he lived on this planet and partakes in the experience of his people. Only those who accept Jesus as their sacrifice *and* as their High Priest will be saved.

Does James' theology of salvation differ highly from that of Paul? Many say that James seems to emphasize works more than Paul, who does not even mention the importance of works in order to be saved. But is this really true? Depending on how the Letter of James is read, the understanding of it shifts. If some verses are read isolated from the rest of the letter, James seems to proclaim a theology of legalism. However, James starts and ends his letter with faith (1:3; 5:15), writes about a special type of

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<sup>20</sup> There are only a few verses that underline the idea of Jesus as an advocate in other NT writings, such as 1 Joh 2:1-2.



wisdom, and therefore establishes a foundation upon which he writes about works (1:5; 3:13-18). Faith is connected with wisdom in his letter:

„The fear of the Lord“ was the starting point of wisdom (Prov 1:7) [...] Earthly wisdom is unspiritual and demonic. Divine wisdom is pure; [...] peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere (Jas 3:17). With wisdom Christians can understand how their trials merged into God’s plan for their lives. They have the commitment to his will necessary to assure that they follow God and not wander from the path of his plan.<sup>21</sup>

Before writing about good deeds (however these may be defined), James explains the actual foundation upon which they have to grow. He does not proclaim steadfastness without faith. However, he tries to explain that saving faith is important (1:3) because human beings lack wisdom without the faith in God (1:5).

James differentiates between heavenly and earthly wisdom. In contrast to earthly wisdom, heavenly wisdom can become part of the believer’s life. It is also necessary to pray for it (1:6). Such a prayer for wisdom is the logical consequence of justification. Therefore, heavenly wisdom is not only connected with faith in the cross of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins (as Paul explains it in 1 Cor 1:18-25), but it is also related to practical consequences in the life of the faithful (3:13-18). James defines wisdom from above as “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (3:17-18).

According to James, heavenly wisdom is a gift and cannot just be used by human beings; if its origin were in humanity, it would turn out to be very egocentric. James tries to convince his readers that they need this wisdom especially concerning partiality and

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<sup>21</sup> Lea, *Hebrews, James*, 258.

for the way they speak. Heavenly wisdom is the consequence of prayer of faith, but nowhere in his whole letter is it related to accomplishing freedom from sin (which Paul calls “works of the law”). It is only related to “works of mercy/love”.<sup>22</sup> By defining heavenly wisdom this way, his focus concerning the process of justification differs from that of Paul but not his understanding of the complete process and its order. Does James really intend to say that a saved person does not sin any longer? Does he want to urge anyone to work harder on his or her salvation? By no means at all: he wants to make clear that it is a gift one has to care about and pray for (1:5,17). His usage of the term *δικαιόω*, which made Luther a critic of James, does not refer to righteousness by works of the law, but to works of love and mercy that prove the true faith of believers and thereby justify them. While Paul focuses on justification by faith alone, James does not reject his approach (he also writes about the law of liberty). He rather focuses on the result of justification, which is also part of the salvation process and cannot be left aside. The reason for obedience is not to become righteous by performing works (which Paul rejects), but to express love and mercy through obedience to the law as a consequence of one’s own experience that Jesus has forgiven one’s sins. If these works remain absent, something about that faith is wrong.

#### John and Peter

John suggests the same approach as James: he writes that the Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world. Jesus carried everyone’s sins on the cross, and not only those of the faithful (Joh 1:29). Those who believe in the word of God and the son pass from death to life and do not come to judgment (5:24). John ascribes various terms to Jesus

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<sup>22</sup> Wiard Popkes, “Two Interpretations of ‘Justification’ in the New Testament: Reflections on Galatians 2:15-21 and James 2:21-25,” *Studia theologica* 59, no. 2 (2005): 132.

throughout the whole gospel. These terms are related to different metaphors illustrating the important role that Jesus plays in the life of a faithful person: bread of life (6:35), sinners must eat his flesh and drink his blood (vv 53-58), the light (8:12), the door (10:9), the shepherd (vv 11,14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way, the truth (14:5) etc. In John's writings, there is no other way to be saved beyond Jesus! He never suggests the abolishment of the Moral Law but strengthens it because it necessitates the forgiveness that Jesus provides. Consequently, if sinners do not realize their need of Jesus, the result will be condemnation (8:24). On the other hand, forgiveness causes a special kind of peace in the heart of a believer. "It's the peace that comes through knowing that your sins are forgiven and your guilt is removed. It's the peace you have when the ruler of the universe is reigning your heart, when you know you have that place in heaven prepared by God's grace."<sup>23</sup>

How can someone get this saving faith in Jesus? How can someone live in the light? The quote of Isaiah 53:1 in John 12:39-40 might imply the idea of predestination. Other texts in the gospel also give the impression that faith is a gift of God (Joh 6:44; 15:16) and cannot be produced by humans. Does God decide who will walk in light or in darkness, and who will be condemned in the end or not?

The formation of faith is a humanly responsible act, which is possible, however, only after God has enlightened the person. [...] [The analogy of light and darkness shows] that the reception of God's prevenient grace in the *event* of justification, in the creation of faith, must come first, but humanity is still responsible for the formation of faith in its decision to believe or disbelieve, in cooperating with God's grace in the *process* of

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<sup>23</sup> Andrew Paterson, *Opening Up John's Gospel* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2010), 126.

justification. A human response to God's grace in justification is necessary.<sup>24</sup>

John uses the parable of light and darkness to explain how salvation works: With his sacrifice, God provides the light, but it is still the decision of humankind to walk in the light or not. His light is love, which saves sinners and is a steadfast promise (1 Joh 4:7-12). Only if someone walks in the light can the blood of Jesus cleanse from all sin (1 Joh 1:7,9). The heart might condemn itself, but the individual might have confidence before God because God is greater than sin and will forgive (3:19-22). Everyone can be saved, but not everyone will be saved. Not everyone wants to be saved and, therefore, walks in the light and accepts God's love. Those who do not accept the sacrifice of Jesus, because they think they do not need it, will be condemned (1:8,10).

Peter indicates the same as he writes about the election of sojourners in his first letter (1Pt 1:1). Mercy makes the difference between those who belong to the people of God and those who do not (2:10). To belong to the people of God means to be born again (1:23) and to be an heir of the good things that God has provided for his people (1:4). No one can contribute anything to his or her own ancestry in order to become an heir. In all these verses, God is the one who becomes active for those he wants to save by his mercy. The idea of faith does not show up randomly in this context (1:5), but it is surrounded by a context that is already familiar to us. Also, Peter's second letter demonstrates that Jesus bought sinners in order to be their master and that they might be his servants – just as Peter was a servant of Christ (2Pt 2:1; 1:19). If Jesus is not accepted as a master, sinners

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<sup>24</sup> Scott Celsor, "The Human Response in the Creation and Formation of Faith: A Narrative Analysis of John 12:20-50 and Its Application to the Doctrine of Justification," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* (January 1, 2008): 119.

continue to be slaves of corruption (2:19-20) and live in error (2:18). This is what God wants to save sinners from (3:9).

### Conclusion

New Testament authors do not contradict each other when they write about salvation. The foundation to save everyone was laid at the cross through Jesus. It is a gift, but only those who believe in his substitutionary merits can be saved; others will be condemned in the judgment. Again, the authors emphasize different points: Paul stresses the free gift and the necessity of a High Priest to be saved in Hebrews. James emphasizes the fact that someone who accepted salvation as a gift performs works of love and mercy (and therefore he does not write about the works that Paul mentions: works of the law). If someone accepts the gift, salvation will have an effect on the life of the believer. John and Peter add that the provided gift should evoke a reaction from the recipient. Otherwise salvation is not possible.

What is salvation? Salvation is a free gift and cannot be completed by human works. This does not mean, however, that one should continue as before; Jesus not only saves from past sins, but he also wants to help his followers to live according to his principles in the present. Some of the authors, especially James, but also Peter and John, mention this. Paul, however, does not talk about it as much as the others. He wants to emphasize the importance of salvation through Christ and not through works. He does not say that works are not important; his aim is to put both aspects in the right order.

### **Consequences of Salvation (Sanctification)**

Even if the structure of this study seems to separate justification from sanctification, it is hard to observe this strict separation because, especially in the letters

of John and Peter, both aspects seem to correlate very strongly with each other. However, they are mentioned in parenthesis in the headlines in order to clarify their meanings. But justification and sanctification are not entirely different ideas. One is not more important than the other. No one should think that salvation does not affect the life of a saved person. The attempt to detach one from the other causes an artificial contradiction and does not fit with John and Peter's intentions. Usually, the separation of both aspects is rather connected to the Epistles of Paul and James because both seem to keep justification and sanctification separate. But is this true?

What status and practical relevance does salvation imply for the faithful? New Testament authors call those who are saved either heirs or children of God (Gal 4:5-6; Jam 2:5; Joh 1:12; 1 Joh 3:1). What does an heir or a child have to do to get this status? So far we have seen that nothing can be done because it is a gift of grace that can only be accepted. The main consequence of salvation is that sinners are adopted children of God and heirs of the heavenly kingdom.

The next question, which many ask immediately after this conclusion, is: why is there a law that is still valid? Or as Paul puts it: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" He answers: "By no means!" (Rom 6:1)

All of the NT writers that we have looked at so far also mention the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the faithful. Paul mentions a life in the Spirit and a law of the Spirit that differs greatly from the life in the flesh under the law of sin and death. (7:25; 8:1). The Spirit of God (or the Spirit of Christ) dwells in the children of God (8:9), and "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Cor 3:17) "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." (Gal 5:18) "In Paul's vocabulary, to walk in the Spirit or be led by the Spirit means to go where the Spirit is going, to listen to his voice, to

discern his will, to follow his guidance.”<sup>25</sup> James calls a body without spirit dead and compares this state to a faith that has no works (2:26). He also writes about the Spirit whom “he has made to dwell in us” (4:5). In connection with keeping the commandments, John calls the Holy Spirit a helper (Joh 14:15-17,26). He convicts the world “concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” and guides into all the truth (16:8,13). Finally, Peter associates the Spirit with sanctification (1Pt 1:2) and confirms that he guides those whose sins are forgiven in different situations (1:11-12; 4:6,14; 2Pt 1:21).

What does the Holy Spirit actually perform in the lives of the already saved believers if they are no longer under the condemning Moral Law? What does it mean to live a life in the Spirit and not in the flesh?

#### Paul and James

Warren W. Wiersbe suggests an interesting comparison of elements in the chapters of the Letter to the Romans (see table 1).

**Table 1 – Justification and sanctification in Romans according to Wiersbe**

<b>Romans 3:21-5:21</b>	<b>Romans 6-8</b>
Substitution: He died for me	Identification: I died with him
He died <i>for</i> my sins	He died <i>unto</i> sin
He paid sin’s penalty	He broke sin’s power
Justification: righteousness	Sanctification: righteousness
imputed (put to my account)	imparted (made a part of my life)
Saved by His death	Saved by His life

<sup>25</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 386.

He comments on this comparison:

Justification by faith is not simply a legal matter between me and God; it is a living relationship. It is “a justification which brings life” (Rom. 5:18, literal translation). I am in Christ and identified with Him. Therefore, whatever happened to Christ has happened to me. When He died, I died. When He arose, I arose in Him. I am now seated with Him in the heavenlies! (see Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 3:1–3) Because of this living union with Christ, the believer has a totally new relationship to sin.<sup>26</sup>

As we have already seen earlier in the Letter of James, salvation does not only imply a new status of the believer but includes a change in the life of a believer that is driven by love and mercy. As the comparison above clearly shows, this concept also exists in Paul’s writings and he focuses on the foundation of salvation – before works of love and mercy can even be performed. The 6<sup>th</sup> chapter and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter keep repeating that the repentant sinner does not want to live the former and sinful life anymore but wants to be like his savior. “As a good teacher he [Paul] knew that truth once stated is not necessarily absorbed.”<sup>27</sup> He wanted to make sure they really understood that human beings may contribute absolutely nothing to their salvation. Nevertheless, this experience of forgiveness of sins is the beginning of a new life, which is not under the control of sin any longer. Just like a woman is released from the law when her husband dies, a sinner is released from the law as soon as he “dies to the law”. Furthermore, as sure as resurrection followed the death of Jesus, a new life follows the death of sin in the life of the faithful.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 531.

<sup>27</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 151.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.



But even Paul admits that this sounds much easier than it really is: while chapter 7 describes a struggle, scholars discuss whether this chapter describes the status of a resurrected believer or of an unfaithful person. Those who hold the latter opinion (e.g. Luther) argue that the description of Romans 7:7-24 does not fit into the life of a converted person. They ask: how can a person who has truly died to sin through Christ and has been resurrected with him be still under the influence of the Old Man? The experience of chapter 7 only fits in the life of a non-converted person who is a slave to sin. Even so, this assumption is not true: only a believer does not want to sin anymore, even if he continues to do so. This is a Christian's every-day-experience. They have already died to the law and now live a new life that is under the righteousness of Christ. Even though they are disgusted with sin, like a vessel that is clean outside, but is still dirty inside, they continue to sin. This seems to be a normal struggle in the life of a believer. However, because of the previous verses in chapters 6 and 7, the sinner can be sure of salvation. Romans 7:25 reveals a hope for the redeemed person that finds him- or herself in this situation. Temptations can be overcome (1 Cor 10:13).

If by the power of the Spirit we keep on putting to death (the Greek verb suggests continuing action) the evil practices of the body, we will live. The lower nature does not automatically fade away when a person comes to Christ. The need to put to death the evil practices of the body is ongoing.<sup>29</sup>

The context of Romans 7:7-24 indicates that the struggle is part of the life of a converted Christian, and the usage of the present tense in these verses underlines this interpretation. The usage of present tense could be interpreted as an attempt to emphasize the seriousness of a person's struggle, but this is probably not the case. A non-converted

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 180.

heart does not voluntarily acknowledge the law to be holy, righteous, and good. In reality, such a heart does not wish to stop sinning at all. Rather, there might be one or several struggles in the life of a converted Christian that will be overcome after a while. Despite that, salvation is something that a Christian can always be confident about. Mounce suggests another translation for “new life” in Romans 6:4: a “new sphere of life”.<sup>30</sup> Some translations use “newness of life”, which makes sense because this does not imply that the saved person stops sinning but lives a life under other circumstances and with another attempt “‘enslaved’ to righteousness.”<sup>31</sup>

In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul warns his recipients of falling back into the former life (1:13). This former life was connected with circumcision, which was promoted by the Judaizers as a condition to be saved. In Paul’s opinion, circumcision represented legalism and had nothing to do with salvation because those who became circumcised were also obliged to keep the whole law (5:3), and were therefore cursed (3:10-11). This old life has to be relinquished to start a new life in Christ (2:16-17), which is still a life in the flesh (v 20) but with another premise. The new life means that sins are forgiven, and believers do not live a life in sin. They simply have acquired another attitude concerning sin. Consequently, they may sin once in a while, but they do not cherish sin and continue to act sinfully without restraint (5:24); a constant progress can be discovered in their behavior (Phi 1:6), and bad habits will be overcome (Col 3:5). “This means that saving faith cannot be reduced to a one-time decision or event in the past; it is a living, dynamic reality permeating every aspect of the believer’s life.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 190.

<sup>32</sup> George, *Galatians*, 201.

Hence, Paul does not reject the efforts to live according to the principles of God but clearly questions the motivation of each believer.

In the Letter of James, the “combination of law and freedom points to the free obedience of the Christian life and echoes Paul’s theology of freedom in Christ [...]”<sup>33</sup>

Richardson explains salvation and its consequences as follows:

Christ brought a “new law,” in the sense that he fulfilled and placed the law upon a new basis in himself (1 Cor 9:21). To serve him is to serve the law; to truly serve the law is therefore to serve him. The same would go for studying the law and thus to be studying him. James made a personal connection not with the life of Christ but rather with the lives of past exemplars of faith who trusted in the Lord (cf. 2:20–26; 5:10–11, 16–18) and thus can be said to have trusted Christ. The law and keeping the law as testimony to the active Word that makes the believer free is in view here.<sup>34</sup>

In this case, he describes the relationship between the law and salvation, and how both of them influence the life of a saved person. Contrary to the opinion that James represents a legalistic theology, this does not mean

... that God justifies his people by our deeds. The Bible insists that saving faith must show itself by visible commitment to the Lord and compassion for others. Faith alone will bring salvation to anyone, but saving faith does not come alone. It is accompanied by works which show the genuineness of faith.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, Paul and James do not represent different opinions and approaches as it is often claimed.<sup>36</sup> Both authors share the opinion that faith “to justify must, from the

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<sup>33</sup> Richardson, *James*, 97.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 97–98.

<sup>35</sup> Lea, *Hebrews, James*, 289.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Jim Reiher, “Paul’s Strained Relationship with the Apostle James at the Time of Writing Galatians (and How It Contributes to the Debate on the Destination of the Letter),” *Evangelical Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (2015): 18–35.

first, include obedience in germ (to be developed subsequently), though the former alone is the ground of justification.”<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, the word δικαιοῶ, which both writers use, can mean both “to impute righteousness” (Paul) and “to show to be righteous” (James).<sup>38</sup> Both meanings contribute to a holistic understanding of salvation.

In this view Paul and James had different purposes and were using the same terms [...] with different connotations. Paul’s concern was the sinner’s basis for justification with God (i.e., the basis for his legal standing with God), while James’s concern was to refute antinomianism by showing that one’s true conversion will be “justified” objectively by works. Paul was writing of a forensic *declaration* of righteousness that a sinner achieves only through faith, and James was writing of a universal *demonstration* of righteousness that is accomplished by works. James sought to show that a person who possesses faith in Christ will be justified (i.e., vindicated as a true Christian) by his or her works, and that a mere claim to a profession of faith that is not vindicated or evidenced by works is not characteristic of genuine conversion.<sup>39</sup>

#### John and Peter

John seems to combine the approaches of Paul and James. “The only spiritual work that pleases God is to allow him to work in us through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>40</sup> This work is necessary because John calls the practice of sin “a life of slavery”, and a person in slavery cannot be saved (8:31-34, 51). Therefore, a true believer practices faith (14:12) and keeps God’s commandments (15:10). But which element comes first: (1) faith or (2) keeping the commandments? 1 Joh 2:3-6 and 5:2-3 give an answer to this question, and we need to understand these texts in the context of the parable of light and darkness.

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<sup>37</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, 2:489.

<sup>38</sup> David R. Maxwell, “Justified by Works and Not by Faith Alone: Reconciling Paul and James,” *Concordia Journal* (2007): 376.

<sup>39</sup> C. Ryan Jenkins, “Faith and Works in Paul and James,” *Bibliotheca sacra*, no. 159 (2002): 64.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 122.

Those who have accepted the free gift of light do not walk in the darkness any longer. However, hating a brother means walking in the darkness – having blinded eyes (2:7-11).<sup>41</sup> Loving the world means to practice the desires of the flesh and of the eyes, which is contrary to the love of God (2:15-17). If sinners begin to walk in the light, they cannot hate their brothers and sisters and continue to sin at the same time. If they do, it shows that darkness is still present in their lives. Hence, faith is necessary to walk in the light. Afterwards, works will follow faith. “The importance of human action as a litmus test of human commitment is a frequent message of the New Testament.”<sup>42</sup> Those who sin without restraint live in a state of lawlessness, which is darkness and “of the devil” (3:3-4, 8-9; 3 Joh 11). Christ came to take away sin, and he also wants to free sinners from their every-day-experience that is afflicted with sin. Consequently, sin is no longer a basic principle in the life of believers but is rather unwanted and unnecessary even if this does not automatically imply that they do not sin any more. “If he [the believer] *does* sin, he must instantly confess to God and claim forgiveness. But it is not *necessary* for him to sin. By yielding his body to the Holy Spirit within him, he will receive the power he needs to overcome the tempter.”<sup>43</sup>

Faith proves to be true or false if it is tested (1Pt 1:7). Peter does not only write about faith, but also about the fact that trials may be tests, which reveal whether there is *true* faith in the life of a Christian. This might be hard at times, but it turns out to be a blessing (3:14). Giving a testimony, gentleness and respect, a good conscience, good behavior, and good deeds instead of doing evil – these things attest that someone is a true

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<sup>41</sup> The Letters of John are highly intertwined with the Gospel of John. See also Joh 13:34-35; 15:12.

<sup>42</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 242.

<sup>43</sup> Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:508.

and faithful believer (3:15-17). In his second letter, Peter also suggests an order that starts with faith and ends with love. Faith is the foundation for everything that follows. Only by faith there might be a continuous increase of good works that are performed as a result of true love towards everyone in the end – even towards enemies. If works do not become apparent at some point in the life of a believer, it indicates that the personal call has not yet been confirmed (2Pt 1:3-10). Jesus not only saves sinners from their sins, but also helps them to stand without sin before God – to practice good deeds that are at no time the reason for salvation (3:14-15). Because he knows that this is an enduring process, he is very patient.

### Conclusion

Works of love and mercy must follow a true faith in the merits of Christ. If such works do not follow, the conviction of an apparent believer must be called a pseudo-faith. All of the authors that were examined in this study draw this conclusion. Even Paul agrees but always tries to establish works on a good foundation, which he calls faith. This kind of faith causes a person to perform works of love (Gal 5:6). If salvation is the reason for the performance of works, one does not try to be righteous by performing works of law. James, John, and Peter also write about works of love and therefore agree with Paul's opinion entirely. Compared to James, Paul does not focus as much on works of love (both focus on different aspects of salvation), but John and Peter link both aspects in a very balanced manner. Concerning the topic of justification and sanctification, NT authors seem to be consistent and do not appear to contradict each other.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLICATIONS

Two main implications follow from the topic that has been discussed. It affects a basic theological and another fundamental, practical issue. Both of them have caused tremendous arguments in the past and will be discussed briefly in this chapter.

#### **Theological Implication**

If there was an inconsistency between Paul and James (or in other words: if they contradicted each other), the following question needs to be asked: can there be other inconsistencies (or contradictions) in the Bible besides the one that has been discussed in this study? These inconsistencies might also relate to other more or less important topics. If there are more contradictions, the next questions to ask would be: how trustworthy can the Bible be when different authors appear to discuss the same topics in contradictory terms? Can one expect to find the written and inspired revelation of God on the pages of Scripture when the authors seem to contradict themselves? Is it necessary to distinguish between author ideas and inspired ideas? Are there any criteria one can use to distinguish between human ideas and divinely inspired ideas in the biblical text? Does the Bible *contain* the word of God, or *is* it the Word of God?

Two examples will be used to illustrate this:

Some Christians say that the whole Bible is the inspired word of God and nothing should be added to it that was created by a human source. Historical-critical scholars

value this opinion as dangerous and extreme for if there is only one inconsistency found in the Bible (and the reader may detect many of them) it might be the beginning of the end of Christian theology. These scholars suggest separating relevant aspects for Christian theology in the Bible (*kerygma*) from myths, legends, or personal opinions, which were influencing the biblical writers while they wrote.<sup>1</sup> Because each criterion is valued in another way by different scholars, such an approach leads to a never-ending discussion about the relevant criteria to separate one from the other. The discussion then leads to the question which aspects in biblical writings were actually revealed by God and how much of the writing process inspired the revelation.

Another example is Luther who read the Bible and especially texts about salvation with personal premises: because it was a notion of God that the church had conveyed over centuries, he saw God as a revengeful and angry God in the beginning. He then understood that this notion of God had to be corrected. While his opinion about divine characteristics was changing, he fell in another extreme and seemed to pick out especially those texts of the Bible which fit well to his new insights. The consequence was that he rejected other texts – such as the Letter of James.

Premises or paradigms that scholars have accepted at some point during their career are the reason for such discussions. They can only be avoided if scholars (1) subordinate themselves under the biblical text and (2) answer the following questions primarily from the Bible: why did NT authors write what they actually wrote? What is the historical background of their writings, and who received their letters? What is the theological evidence for and against consistency in the NT concerning this topic? How

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<sup>1</sup> A good example for such an approach is Rudolf K. Bultmann. See Alexander P. B. Bennie, “Bultmann and the Theological Significance of Myth,” *Anglican Theological Review* 42, no. 4 (1960): 316–325.



did theologians – beginning from ancient times until now – solve these contradictions?  
How did this topic influence church history?

It is important to first identify the premises that a scholar has concerning his study. It is very important to read the Bible without having any external premises. Instead, its content can be understood and interpreted without these premises, which are influenced more or less by human ideologies. The Bible can be its own interpreter (as was demonstrated above concerning the topic of salvation). An exclusively biblical approach should be considered at least as valid as any other premise next to historical-critical arguments.

After we have taken a closer look at the topic of salvation, consisting out of two important elements that are called justification and sanctification, it is easier to give a partial answer. The purpose of each NT author may differ from the respective other (as can be seen when Paul and James are compared with each other). However, the historical background and the stories that have been delivered through the NT indicate that they addressed different groups of people who had different needs. Therefore, it is logically comprehensible that one letter also differs from the other, although they do not really hold contradictory opinions. A closer examination of particular terms and their meanings in the writings of a biblical author might help just as much as a closer look at Acts 15 and the context of the critical verses.

### **Practical Implication**

The example of Luther's struggle with God indicates that the topic of salvation is strongly connected with a person's notion of God. The influence of personal experiences in the life of a believer should not be underestimated. If every-day experience dissents

from what one reads in the Bible, it might lead either to the rejection of scripture, or it might change the notion that one has of God.

Hence, the order of justification and sanctification can make a powerful difference. If God demanded obedience concerning his law as a condition before he could or wanted to forgive sins, Christians might soon become discouraged; their every-day experience makes them aware of their incapability to obey the Moral Law. If Christians had to live perfectly according to divine principles, and if God did not provide help for them, God could probably be considered a cruel god. No one would want to or could be saved by him; instead, everyone had to be saved from him.

The notion of God changes completely if God is a being that provides help concerning justification and sanctification. This study carved out the fact that God saves sinners without any conditions by (1) justification, which describes the process of forgiveness of all sins that have been performed in the past. But the matter must not rest there: (2) God also provides help for the process of sanctification and by giving sinners the power to overcome temptation. Both aspects make salvation complete and are only possible because God enabled them. It is apparent that the Bible delivers good news for sinners and conveys a notion of a loving, and caring God. As such, it should be preached and taught to members of the church in order to encourage them. Hence, either legalistic or liberal approaches should be rejected if they do not confirm the biblical testimony. Since these kinds of approaches seem to have a potential to cause arguments and misunderstandings and do not do justice to what NT actually meant, it would be a good idea to keep them unconsidered.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINAL CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this study, two main questions were raised: do NT authors represent the same kind of theology concerning the topic of salvation or is there a difference between their particular approaches? Is there a need to emphasize the differences between the authors, or does the Bible indicate that there is no reason to limit the authority of one or the other author?

The final answer that must be given after this short examination is: New Testament authors do not contradict each other on the topic of salvation. A closer study reveals no theological differences among the different writers' points of view and approaches. Some of them tried to focus on justification and sanctification in their correct chronological order, some focused on the truthfulness of faith that presents itself through appropriate works, and others emphasized the importance of both aspects to show that they are inseparable. All of them do not question either one or the other aspect but accept both.

The reason for this study was to show exactly this: there is no contradiction concerning this topic in the NT. Scholars claiming that such inconsistencies exist must be asked which premises they adopted in order to draw this conclusion. Church history reveals that there are many personal approaches and attempts that highly influenced the theology of some (even famous) scholars. Even though they made some good points in

their approaches, it seems as if they did not take the entire Bible with its premises into account.

It was not the aim of this study to convince other scholars that someone has found a better solution for an apparent tension concerning salvation in the NT. Instead, the goal was to present a different kind of interpretation that might be considered less influenced by historical-critical, but more by biblical thought. To give other scholars the opportunity to choose from and review various kinds of interpretation, such an approach should be presented as equally valid next to other historical-critical approaches.

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