

How Are We Saved?

Faith and Works according to Paul and James

Introduction

1. Catholic vs. Protestants on Justification
 - a. Protestants → Justified by “Faith alone” (Latin *sola Fide*) (Romans 3)
 - b. Catholics → Justified by Works, “not by Faith alone” (James 2:24)
2. Passage I Always Wondered About: Ephesians 2

For *by grace you have been saved through faith*; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not *because of works*, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

3. Questions:
 - a. Is Saint Paul a proto-Protestant?
 - b. How do I reconcile Ephesians 2 with James 2?
4. What is the *Catholic Church’s* official teaching on how we are saved?
 - a. The Council of Trent (1547)
 - b. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992)

Saint Paul is Speaking about the Grace of *Initial* Justification

¹ And you he made alive, when *you were dead through the trespasses and sins* ² in which *you once walked*, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. ³ *Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh*, following the desires of body and mind, and so *we were by nature children of wrath*, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

The *Catechism* on Original Sin: A State of Spiritual Death

Following St. Paul, the Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination toward evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with *Adam’s sin* and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, *a sin which is the “death of the soul.”* ...By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a *personal sin*, but this sin affected *the human nature* that they would then transmit *in a fallen state*. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called “sin” only in an analogical sense: it is a sin “contracted” and not “committed”—a state and not an act. (CCC 403)

Council of Trent: Because of Original Sin, Neither Nature or Law Justify

The holy council declares that for a correct and clear understanding of *the doctrine of justification it is necessary that each one admits and confesses that all men, having lost innocence through the sin of Adam, “became unclean”, and, according to the apostle, were “by nature children of wrath”* (Eph 2:3), *as the council taught in its decree on Original Sin*. So completely were they the slaves of sin and under the power of the devil and death that *not only the Gentiles by means of the power of nature but even the Jews by means of the letter of the law of Moses were unable to liberate themselves and to rise from that state*, even though their free will, weakened and distorted as it was, was in no way extinct. (Decree on Justification, Chapter 1).

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The *Catechism* on Pelagianism and the Protestant Reformers

The Church's teaching on the transmission of original sin was articulated more precisely in the fifth century, especially under the impulse of St. Augustine's reflections against *Pelagianism*, and in the sixteenth century, in opposition to the Protestant Reformation. *Pelagius held that man could, by the natural power of free will and without the necessary help of God's grace, lead a morally good life*; he thus reduced the influence of Adam's fault to bad example. *The first Protestant reformers, on the contrary, taught that original sin has radically perverted man and destroyed his freedom*; they identified the sin inherited by each man with the tendency to evil (*concupiscentia*), which would be insurmountable. (CCC 406)

Back to Ephesians 2: Saint Paul's on Grace, Faith, and Works

And you he made alive, *when you were dead* through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and *so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (*by grace you have been saved*), ⁶ and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—* ⁹ *not because of works*, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:1-9)

Saint Paul's Teaching

1. "Saved by grace" (Greek) (Eph 2:5, 8)
2. "Through faith" (Greek) (Eph 2:8)
3. "Not because of works" (Greek) (Eph 2:9)

The *Catechism*: No One Can Merit the Initial Grace of Salvation

Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion*. (CCC 2010)

St. Paul on the Role of Works *after* Initial Justification

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not because of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

St. Paul's Teaching: Saved by Grace, through Faith, for Good Works

1. "Saved by grace" (Greek) (Eph 2:5, 8)
2. "Through faith" (Greek) (Eph 2:8)
3. "Not because of works" (Greek) (Eph 2:9)
4. "Created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Greek *epi ergois agathois*) (Eph 2:10)
5. "Which God prepared beforehand" (Greek *ho theos*) (Eph 2:10)

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St. James is Talking about Good Works *after* Justification by Faith

¹⁴ What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has *faith* but has *not works*? *Can his faith save him?* ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? ¹⁷ *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.* ¹⁸ But some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? ²² You see that *faith was active along with his works*, and *faith was completed by works*, ²³ and the scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”; and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ *You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.* (James 2:14-24)

St. James Teaching: Justification by Works, not by Faith Alone

1. “Faith” (Greek *pistis*) by itself cannot “save” (Greek) a person (James 2:14)
2. “Faith” (Greek *pistis*) without “works” (Greek *erga*) is “dead” (James 2:17)
3. “Faith” is “active along with works” (Greek *sy*) (James 2:22)
4. “Faith” is “completed” (Greek) by “works” (Greek) (James 2:22)
5. A man is “justified by works” (Greek) (James 2:24)
6. “Not by faith alone” (Greek) (James 2:24)

The Catechism on Grace, Good Works, and Merit

The term “merit” refers in general to the recompense owed by a community or a society for the action of one of its members... deserving reward or punishment... *With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man.* Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from him, our Creator. The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace. *The fatherly action of God is first on his own initiative, and then follows man’s free acting through his collaboration, so that the merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful.* Man’s merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given by the Holy Spirit... The merits of our good works are gifts of the divine goodness. (CCC 2006-2009)

The Catechism: We Can Then Merit the Graces of Further Sanctification

Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification*, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God’s wisdom. These graces and goods are the object of Christian prayer... *The charity of Christ is the source in us of all our merits* before God. Grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God and before men. The saints have always had a lively awareness that their merits were *pure grace*. (CCC 2010-2011)