

# James

## I. Introduction

A. **James 2:14-26** . . . What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? [17] Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. [18] But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." [19] You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. [20] But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? [21] Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? [22] You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; [23] and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And 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. [25] In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? [26] For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

## B. Prayer

## II. Faith That Saves Is Faith That Produces The Fruit Of Righteousness

A. **James 2:14** . . . What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

1. Words or claims of faith by themselves, or stating what you believe without appropriate and accompanying actions do not equal saving faith. In other words, saying you believe in God, or that you are trusting in Christ for salvation only becomes saving faith when you act according to what you say you believe in.

a. What is the point? For faith to be saving faith, and not empty claims of faith, it must include or produce action that agrees with any claim to faith you are making.

b. No action, or (*obviously*) actions contrary to what we say we believe demonstrates our so-called faith is an empty claim.

2. Now, let's take a moment and look at the popular teaching and theology of our day surrounding this matter of saving faith.
  - a. The most popular theology of our day says that we are saved by faith plus nothing. And though this is completely true, its truth has been diluted by other teachings and an increasing tolerance of sinfulness among those who attend Christian churches, so that now, many think that claiming faith in Christ for salvation is enough to ensure them entrance into God's eternal Kingdom. In other words, claiming faith is now treated as if it were equal to the faith that works and is therefore saving faith.
  - b. It appears that James was running into this same misrepresentation of saving faith. And so James is making it clear that the only faith that saves is the faith that is accompanied by obvious manifestations of a changed heart, a changed mind, and a progressively changing life whose goal is to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.
  - c. With this in mind, I want to end our examination of this verse with these words: Behavior is the most accurate and compelling statement about whom and in what we put our faith.

B. **James 2:15-17** . . . If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, [16] and **one of you** says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and **yet you** (all of you – "ye" in the KJV) do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? [17] Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

1. There are three important points to see in these three verses.
  - a. First, this is an example of just how meaningless faith without action truly is.
    - (1) God makes this point by going so far as to say that faith without works is dead. Though some may consider this an extreme statement, let us consider what dead faith is.
    - (2) To be dead is to no longer be alive – which means that whatever faith was there is now absolutely gone. To be dead is to no longer be relevant or important – which means that whatever claims of faith we might make, they are absolutely unimportant and irrelevant to God. In other words, faith without works is equal to having no faith at all – which means faith without works is equal to being an unbeliever.
  - b. The second important point I want us to see is that there is a change in the use of the word "you" from singular to plural in

**verse 16.** Listen carefully as I read this verse and you will see what I mean: “. . . and **one of you** says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and **yet you** (all of you – “ye” in the KJV) do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

- (1) Now the question to ask is why this change from singular to plural? What is God trying to get us to see?
  - (2) For me, the point is this: What we corporately, that is, what we, as a group approve, or go along with, or tolerate, or silently allow, we are.
    - (a) In other words, we are, as a group, not what we claim to be but what we do or do not do.
    - (b) Or to say this another way to help us see this truth in this context: It isn't what we as an entire group claim to be that determines whether the faith we have will save us, it is what we do or do not do that determines if we have saving faith, or empty, useless claims of faith.
  - (3) To me this means that we have a responsibility to God and each other to guard against and work against and plead against and pray against empty claims of faith in any individual among us. Why? Here are two reasons:
    - (a) Because we know that one bad apple, over time, can spoil the whole bushel.
    - (b) And we also know that what we approve or tolerate or go along with is what we are.
- c. The third important point here in **James 2:15-17** is that loving our neighbor as ourselves is a classic example of saving faith. It is not the only example, as we can see from a broader reading of the scriptures. But it is a classic and an important example. Consider these words from John's first letter:
- (1) By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother (**I John 3:10**).
  - (2) Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [8] The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love (**1 John 4:7-8**).

C. **James 2:18 . . .** [18] But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

1. As it is written and translated for us, this is a difficult passage to make sense of.
  - a. For starters, it is hard to follow just who the personal pronouns are referring to. For example, to whom do the personal pronouns refer in the "you have faith" and "I have works?"
  - b. Another difficulty is the "someone" that is raising the question? Is it a friend or an opponent? Knowing this can change how we interpret what is said.
  - c. Then there is the problem of discerning how much of this verse is to be included in what the "someone" is saying, and how much is the response?
2. Here is my effort at putting this verse in a form we can more easily understand: "*Someone may make the point that they have faith and I have works. To this I would respond, 'try to show me your faith without any works to support your claim, and I will show you my faith by pointing to those actions which affirm my faith.'*"
  - a. Remember the story of Blondin, the French tightrope walker who invited someone in the crowd to let him push them over Niagra Falls in a wheelbarrow?
  - b. You may claim to believe he can do it, put how would you prove the reality of your faith without any supporting actions?
  - c. Whereas, if I get into the wheelbarrow and allow Him to take me over and bring me back, that is undeniable proof that I have faith in Blondin's ability to safely take me over and bring me back. In this way, I have shown my faith to be real by my actions.

D. **James 2:19 . . .** You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

1. This is the second example of the contrast between claims of faith and saving faith. However, this time, James is comparing faith in a truth that does not lead to an appropriate response to that truth and saving faith.
2. To believe that there is only one God (the unity of the trinity) and that He is supreme, is good. It is so good, in fact, that it is also a significant step in the direction of saving faith. And yet, without the accompanying works of righteousness that are the result of a changed

heart, a changed mind, and a changed life, such belief is of no value in relation to eternal salvation.

3. How do we know this to be the case? The demons also acknowledge and believe in the fact that God is both One and supreme. But the only affect it has on them is trembling. Their belief in this truth produces no repentance, no dying to self, to putting off the old nature and putting on Christ – in other words, no change of life in agreement with what they believe to be true. **Therefore, their faith, though real in the sense that it believes a certain truth to be true, is not saving faith because it does not produce the works of saving faith.**

E. **James 2:20-23** . . . [20] But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? [21] Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? [22] You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected (brought to completion or its mature conclusion); [23] and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

1. **Verse 20:** The words, "*are you willing*" implies we have both the ability and the freedom to see and accept this truth. Not seeing and accepting the truth so as to treat claimed faith as if it were equal to saving faith is not due to inability, but rather unwillingness.
2. **Verse 21:** Sadly, there has grown a division within the Church where some say these words of James contradict the teaching of Paul in Romans concerning justification by faith. And there has been, in the last couple hundred years, a growing emphasis on grace to the point of treating James words as if he were proposing a works based salvation.
  - a. It is my opinion that if we keep in mind the scriptures as a whole while examining its individual parts, we will not come to either of these conclusions.
  - b. For example, the same Paul who wrote: "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." [4] Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. [5] But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness"

(**Romans 4:2-5**), also wrote: “But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [6] who will render to each person according to his deeds: [7] to those who **by perseverance in doing good** seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; [8] but to those **who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth**, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation” (**Romans 2:5-8**).

- c. You see, James is not proposing that we can pay our debt of sin and therefore earn our salvation through good works any more than Paul is proposing that empty claims of faith that do not produce changed lives are equal to saving faith.
  - d. So why does James say one thing about saving faith and Paul another? Because James is correcting the false teaching that claims of faith without appropriate accompanying actions are equal to saving faith, while Paul is correcting the false teaching that we can earn salvation by doing enough good works to convince God we are worthy to be given entrance into His eternal kingdom.
- F. **James 2:24-25** . . . [24] You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. [25] In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.
1. **Verse 24** – James is not saying that we are saved by works, but by a faith that works. This is made clear when James adds: “*and not by faith alone.*”
  2. Now on to Rahab. For me, Rahab is an interesting example of faith. She is mentioned here and in **Hebrews 11:31**. In both places she is identified as being a harlot (prostitute) – which is hardly a flattering label. And to our knowledge, she had no previous experience with God or with the religious practices of Israel. Obviously, she and the rest of the city had heard how many great things the God of Israel had done for the Israelites. We know this because Joshua tells us the residents of Jericho were terrified with fear at the possibility of Israel attacking them (**Joshua 2**).
  3. So why use Rahab as an example of saving faith? Well, consider the contrast between Rahab and the rest of the residents of Jericho.
    - a. The residents of Jericho believed in the God of Israel and His ability to destroy them. Therefore, they were living in fear – just

like the demons. Their faith was real, but it was also useless for saving them from the coming doom because it did not produce appropriate deeds in keeping with their faith.

- b. On the other hand, Rahab not only believed the stories about Israel's God, she acted on her faith, siding with Israel, and doing what was right in the sight of God. For this, she was saved from the destruction that came upon Jericho and its citizens.

- G. **James 2:26** . . . For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

### III. Conclusion

- A. If our claim to saving faith does not change such things as our thinking, our desires, our values, the principles by which we live, our morality, our love of others and the way we treat others, our submission to God, our obedience to the word of God, our entertainments, our unfounded or foolish fears, our sources of security, our use of finances, our general sense of contentment, our pride, our personal integrity, the amount of alcohol we consume or the drugs we take, our faithfulness in marriage, our parenting, our driving, our timeliness and being on time, the keeping of our word, the way we do business, how we treat other people's possessions, the importance of God to us, and our worship of God, then whatever faith we claim to have, it is not saving faith.
- B. Behavior is the most accurate and compelling statement about whom and in what we put our faith.