

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. This portion of James is specifically about faith, but not just any faith. It is about saving faith – as made clear by God in the first verse of this section, which says: "What use is it, my brethren, if someone **says he has faith** but he has no works? **Can that faith save him?**" (**James 2:14**)
1. The first thing I would like us to take note of are the words: "**if someone says he has faith**" (James 2:14).
 - a. Many claim to have faith in God for salvation, but claimed faith is not necessarily the same as actual faith. The only way our self-proclaimed faith in God for salvation is the same as actual saving faith is when our claimed faith produces a life in keeping with the life that saving faith produces. And indeed, saving faith produces a life of righteousness, godly love, and good works.

- b. In our own country, and depending on how the question is asked, some 25-45 percent of the population claim that they are either Born-Again Christians, or, in the broadest sense of the word, “Evangelical” Christians. In other words, right here where we live, many claim to have put their faith in God for salvation, and they fully expect to go to heaven for eternity when they die. However, if their faith does not result in a life of submission to God, obedience to God’s word, and a life of good works toward their neighbor, then whatever they have is not saving faith.
 - c. Therefore, when folks around us say they are saved and on their way to heaven, yet their lives do not manifest the marks of saving faith, we ought to speak to them about the difference between claimed faith and saving faith. And we ought to do this out of a loving concern for their eternal well-being.
- 2. The second thing I would like us to see in these verses on faith is that James uses the word “faith” in two different ways.
 - a. One use of the word faith refers to claiming you agree with and therefore believe in certain truths or established realities, while failing or choosing to act in a way that fulfills the requirements those truths or realities place on those who believes in them.
 - b. James other use of the word faith refers to saving faith, which includes making claims of faith and acting in ways that fulfill the requirements placed on those who believe in Christ for salvation. These requirements include such things as faith in the redeeming work of Jesus on our behalf, repentance from rebellion against God, bringing an end to willful sinning, submission to God, obedience to God’s word, dying to self, and loving others as we love ourselves.
 - c. My point here is simple, when you examine or contemplate this portion of James, remember that he is using the word faith in these two ways.
- 3. The third thing I want us to notice in this portion on faith is that saving faith is spoken of as if it were the same as faith for everyday living.
 - a. You see, we tend to separate saving faith from faith for daily Christian living. It is as if saving faith were one thing and how we live after coming to saving faith is not only separate from saving faith, it has no bearing on our saving faith.
 - b. James does not draw this distinction. In fact, he speaks of saving faith and faith for daily living as one and the same faith. We see

this clearly in his example of **faith without works** and **faith that works** as found in **verses 15-16**, which speaks of caring for someone in need. In other words, according to this portion on faith, saving faith is a life-long expression of faith that manifests itself day in and day out, in word and in deed, or in other words, in ways that either validate or nullify the existence of saving faith within us.

- B. Interestingly, this is not the first time James makes the point that for faith to save you, it must produce a life that lives according to the will and word of God.
1. Let's return to **James 1:21-22** . . . Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to **save your souls**. [22] **But prove yourselves doers of the word**, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.
 - a. James goes on to point out that failing to do what [we know] is right makes our religion – that is, our faith – worthless.
 - b. So in chapter 1, James points out that knowing without doing means our faith is worthless. Here in chapter 2, he says faith without appropriate accompanying works is dead. The words, **useless** and **dead** are strong enough words to convince us that God is serious about what He is saying concerning saving faith.
 2. Now some may say: “But that is James talking, and everyone knows he is weak on justification by faith and strong on works based faith.” To answer such an assertion, let's look at a few other scriptures that make the same point, but are found outside of James.
 - a. John wrote in his letter: “If you know that [God] is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him” (**I John 2:29**).
 - b. And John went on to say: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because [God's] seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10] 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 3:9-10**).
 - c. In continuing his three chapters on justification by faith, Paul writes: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? [2] May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? [3] Or do you not know that all of us who have

been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? [4] Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. [5] For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, [6] knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; [7] for he who has died is freed from sin. [12] Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, [13] and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (**Romans 6:1-7, 12-13**).

- d. **II Corinthians 5:14-15, 17** . . . For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; [15] and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. [17] Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
- e. **Galatians 2:20** . . . I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
- f. **Galatians 5:24** . . . Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

C. To summarize the main point here in **James 2:14-26**, we would say it this way: “If our lives are not bearing the fruit of saving faith (godly living, doing the works of righteousness), then we do not have saving faith – regardless of what we think we have in relation to saving faith and eternal salvation.”

D. A story that illustrates faith that saves:

- 1. Niagara Falls is a well known landmark on a great inland waterway known as the St. Lawrence Seaway. Millions have visited these magnificent waterfalls to see their beauty and grandeur. A few have gone there to defy the power of the water as it pours over the falls, creating turbulent whirlpools with mighty undertows in the river

below. Most everyone who risks their life in these daring feats goes over the falls in some contraption. Too often, the water wins, and a life is lost.

2. One of the few who tempted the falls and won was Charles Blondin, a famous French tightrope walker. Instead of going over the falls in some contraption, he walked across the falls on a tightrope. Actually, he walked across several times: once blindfolded, once on stilts, once carrying one of his helpers on his shoulders, and once pushing a wheelbarrow. It is said that before each crossing Blondin asked the crowd if they were confident he could make it. Each time, the crowd gave voice to their confidence with wild cheering. Upon returning from pushing the wheelbarrow across, Blondin again approached the crowd. This time he asked if they thought he could push one of them safely across the falls. The crowd cheered loudly, proclaiming their confidence that he could do it. After quieting them down, Blondin then asked which one of them would step forward and get into the wheelbarrow. No one moved.
3. It is one thing to profess faith in something or someone. It is quite another to place faith in something or someone, and act or live accordingly. At best, claimed or professed faith is intellectual agreement with what is obvious and the admission of possibility with what seems to be true. This means that professed faith is not faith, for it requires no personal trust or dependence on the object of faith. It involves no personal risk. It demands no commitment – all of which are simply other ways of saying it produces no behavior in agreement with what is claimed to be believed.
4. The onlookers at Niagara Falls publicly and enthusiastically claimed faith in Blondin. Yet when he asked them to live according to their faith, it became obvious they did not trust in Blondin and his wheelbarrow. Though they professed faith in his ability to take someone across the Falls, no one trusted him enough to put their own life in his hands. No one acted according to the faith they claimed by stepping forward and getting into the wheelbarrow. They were willing to intellectually agree with what was obvious and admit the possibility of what seemed to be true, but they were not willing to place trust in him in a way that produced the action of getting into the wheelbarrow.
5. Now let's examine what faith in Blondin would look like so we can get some idea of what saving faith looks like. Putting faith in Blondin would mean getting into the wheelbarrow and trusting him to safely

transport you back and forth across the falls – in spite of all the potential risks to your well-being. It would require following every instruction and obeying every command, so as to do nothing other than exactly what Blondin said to do. And of course, during the trip's most perilous moments you would trust all the more to his every word and be all the more diligent to do exactly as he said. Any deliberate movement contrary to his will, even if you deemed it necessary to protect your own well-being, would be an act of unbelief and most probably result in disaster. In other words, you would only have faith in Blondin if you willingly placed your life in his hands by getting into the wheelbarrow and following all his instructions as he took you across the Falls and brought you safely back. Anything less would be professed faith, which is really unbelief coupled with intellectual agreement to what is possible.

- E. Once again, the point of all this is that saving faith does include agreeing with the facts of Christ being God in human flesh, the facts concerning His birth, death, resurrection, His being the propitiation for our sins, His reconciling us to God, and His being the basis of our confidence in the promise of eternal life in heaven for those who believe.
 - 1. However, for saving faith to save you, you must not only agree with all those truths about Christ, you must also live according to the will and words of the One from whom you expect to gain God's great and gracious salvation – for as Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (**Matthew 7:21**).
 - 2. Therefore, we could say that saving faith is willful trust in God to the extent that we live according to the will of God while relying on God to do for us according to what He has promised to do.
- F. Now I realize the power of theology and church culture to influence us. So for those who are thinking I have moved away from salvation by grace and am teaching a works based salvation, let me quickly say that doing the will of God can never pay the penalty for your sin.
 - 1. The only way you can be with God eternally is to turn to Jesus Christ to pay that penalty for you.
 - 2. However, doing God's will from the moment of repentance and faith for salvation to our dying breath is not only the natural outcome of saving faith, it is the only kind of faith that saves. And why is it the

only kind of faith that saves? Because it is the only kind of faith God responds to with the free and gracious gift of His great salvation.

3. Listen carefully as I read **Titus 2:11-14**, for it is in these verses that we learn God's intentions for salvation as well as the natural outcome of salvation: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, [12] instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, [13] looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, [14] who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

III. Conclusion

- A. I want to close with these words: "Behavior is the most accurate and compelling statement about in whom and in what we put our faith."