

Faith Revealed by Works (Part 1 of #12)

James 2: 14-26

Tonight we come to a key passage in the book of James. It is a passage that is often misunderstood, misinterpreted, and rejected outright. Martin Luther rejected the writings of James as “an epistle of straw” because, in his view, it stood in opposition to the doctrine of faith revealed in the Bible. Luther’s view continues to be embraced by many today. There are those who cannot reconcile the writings of James with the writings of Paul. Some believe that James teaches salvation based on works rather than faith, and look to this particular passage to raise their argument. We will discover there is no contradiction in the writings of Paul and those of James. Someone has said, *Paul and James do not stand face to face fighting against each other, but back to back fighting opposite foes.*

When you read the second chapter of James in its context, it is evident he is not teaching salvation by works. In our last study James openly declared that it is impossible to keep the entire law of God, and failure in one single point creates guilt in all points. Keeping the law and personal works are the foundation for works based salvation. I cannot see how anyone can arrive at that conclusion from James. His emphasis is not works, but rather faith. Much that we have considered already dealt with the faith of the believer when tried and tempted, praying in faith, and faith in Christ that dictates our treatment and reception of others. As he moves into this paragraph, faith remains in view and continues to be the primary focus.

I want to take our time moving through these verses. I trust we will all gain a proper understanding of the truth they reveal, and put to rest any confusion that may exist. So, let’s get into the text considering the [certainties](#) disclosed as we think on: [Faith Revealed by Works](#).

I. The Examination of Faith (14-18) – In these verses James provides a thorough examination of faith. This should not cause alarm; in fact we ought to examine our faith from time to time. Adrian Rogers said, “*Faith that can’t be tested can’t be trusted.*” Consider:

A. The Mystery of Faith (14) – [What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?](#) This is one of the verses that receives much attack and is the source of much controversy. As we consider this powerful statement, we must keep in mind one of the principle rules for proper interpretation: Scripture must be read and studied in its context. We notice that James is writing to the [brethren](#), Jews who have come to faith in Christ. They were steeped in the Bible. They knew its doctrines and the traditions associated with it. They were very zealous in teaching these truths to their children. Sadly many of the Jews in James’ day had no

desire to be live according to the teaching of Christ. Paul, on the other hand, faced the legalist who sought to contaminate the Gospel by teaching the necessity of keeping the Law.

- When Paul speaks of works in his epistles, he speaks of the works of the Law, the keeping of the Law, and provision obtained through the Law. James speaks of an entirely different type of works. We have already mentioned that our previous study refuted man's ability to keep the law, and thus salvation by works of the Law is impossible. Paul and James agree entirely on that biblical truth. James is not contradicting himself in this verse. The key is in the meaning of the [works](#) in which James speaks. [What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?](#) He speaks of [works](#) that deal with "*the fruits of faith, those resulting from salvation, the change that is apparent after the new birth.*"
- Now, does that not make perfect sense? James raises the question regarding any benefit of one who claims to have faith and yet there is no fruit of that faith. There is no apparent change in life. There is no evidence of the new birth at all. Can that type of faith save a man? I admit that I must agree entirely with James. This man's faith is of no value; he hasn't received anything that has generated change in his life. He is still the same man he used to be!
- Really when we consider this passage in its context, we find a biblical truth that needs to be boldly proclaimed rather than sheepishly avoided. Modern theology has created the lie of "easy believism." We have cheapened the Gospel to nothing more than the raising of a hand, repeating a prayer, or being sent through the baptismal waters. What is that type of faith grounded in? Is it faith in the preacher, baptism, or saying the right words? Personal regeneration comes from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ when conviction has gripped our hearts. We see ourselves in need of Christ, and Him alone, not in going through the ritual of modernism or meeting the expectations of an evangelist. There are many who profess faith, but what type of faith are they professing? Many have made a profession with no possession, and their lives reveal no fruit of salvation!

B. The Ministry of Faith (15-16) – James speaks of the ministry that follows genuine faith. There are a couple of aspects we need to consider. The Ministry of Faith is:

1. Motivated by Sympathy (15) – [If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,](#) This reveals a situation in which the reader of any generation would be familiar. In James' day there were many who stood in desperate need of help from others. They had no way of meeting their most basic needs. One of genuine faith would be motivated to help others in their time of need. Really we are never more like our Savior than when we give of ourselves for the good of others.

- Now I know there are many organizations that exist to meet the needs of the less fortunate. Just because someone possesses sympathy for the hurting, and gives of their time or material

possessions to help them, doesn't necessarily reveal a relationship with Christ. In fact, they may be as lost as anyone else. However, James reveals this characteristic ought to be obvious in the believer's life. Our faith should motivate us to have sympathy and show compassion.

2. Minimized through Apathy (16) – *And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?* This is very simple and easy to understand. Empty words will not clothe the naked or feed the hungry. We can talk of faith as much as we want, but if our faith doesn't motivate us to action, it is faith of little profit or value. This is the classic example of faith without works.

- We cannot possibly meet every need we encounter, but we ought to be a people known for generosity and compassion. James likely knew those who professed faith in Christ, having the means to help others, and yet their actions never matched their words. Genuine faith will create a desire to help others. It will be impossible to realize the needs of others and not be moved by them. We will be compelled to do all we can to make a difference in the lives of others.

C. The Measure of Faith (17-18) – Here we see how faith is measured. This too is two-fold.

1. Faith is Accompanied by Works (17) – *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.* James reveals a fundamental truth: faith cannot abide alone. If our faith is not accompanied by works, then our faith is dead. It is faith of little value or profit. Genuine faith will generate works.

- One who possesses real faith has no problem with these truths. Faith and works are not contrary to each other; they complement each other. They do not work against each other, they are consistent with each other. Those whose hearts are right with the Lord, walking in close fellowship with Him, will produce works consistent with their faith. Their faith will compel them to work. Works without faith is vain, and faith without works is dead.

2. Faith is Apparent through Works (18) – *Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.* We have all heard the sayings: Actions speak louder than words, and, your actions speak so loud I can't hear a word you are saying. That is exactly what James is emphasizing here. Many may talk about their faith, but there are never any actions to substantiate their claim. James says we ought to let our works speak for our faith. We ought to be so diligent in the Lord's work that there is no question concerning our faith. Many claim to be a Christian, but there is never any fruit consistent with that claim. I want my relationship with Christ, and faith in Him, to be self evident!

I. The Examination of Faith (14-18)

II. The Expression of Faith (19-20) – James goes on to speak of how faith is expressed. In these verses we discover the various types of faith. We see first:

A. Intellectual Faith (19a) – *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well*: We must keep in mind that James is dealing with the Jews. He is dealing with those who were raised reading and reciting the Old Testament Scriptures. He would have been hard pressed to find a Jew that denied the existence of the true and living God. They would have readily admitted that God existed and that He alone was God.

- James is not making light of their recognition of God. I am sure he was glad they believed that God existed. In fact, they likely believed in the miracles He had performed in the lives of their ancestors. There would have been little argument that God had exercised a profound presence in the lives of Israelites throughout history.
- There was one major problem however; this was a mere head knowledge, intellectual knowledge that lacked heart knowledge. They had faith that God existed, and that no other rivaled Him, but they did not possess a heart knowledge of Him. Intellectual faith lacked a genuine relationship with Christ, and produced no fruits of salvation. Have we not met many like that in our day as well. There are many who possess intellectual faith, but lack saving faith in Christ. It is never enough just to believe that God exists!

B. General Faith (19b) – *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble*. James further emphasizes the vanity of faith that doesn't produce works consistent with salvation. The demons also believe in God. We know that is true by the account of Jesus encountering them with the Maniac among the tombs. *Mark 5:7 – And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not*. The demons recognized Jesus; they even admitted that He was the Son of the most high God, but they had no desire or intention to come to Him by faith.

- There is a general faith that many possess, but this faith too is empty and void. There are a lot of people who believed that Jesus was the Son of God, but never received salvation. Many of them have died lost and found themselves in hell, separated from God, although they believed He existed. Intellectual and general faith are never enough. There must be faith that recognizes Jesus as the Savior of the world, admitting our lack and need for Him, coming by faith in salvation.

C. Optimal Faith (20) – *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* James offers a rhetorical question to reveal the faith we all need. One who fully understands the gravity of all he has just said, should have no problem embracing saving faith in Christ. Optimal faith in the Lord will be faith that consistently produces works. We understand that works do not save, but they will be evident in the life of those who are saved. Some will produce more works than others, but salvation will produce works. They will be evident in the life of a believer.

- Once faith moves from the head to the heart a definite change takes place. Our lives are no longer dictated by our thoughts, outside influences, or desires of the flesh. Our lives are submitted to the authority of the Lord. That is not to say that we will always behave as we should, but our faith will show and it will be evident for the world to see. If one has to argue their faith or continually seek to convince others of their faith, it is evident their faith is lacking. Those who belong to Christ will have their faith confirmed by their works!

Conclusion: We will pick up with the remaining verses in our next study. They too have been the subject of debate and are much too important to rush through. I trust you have been enlightened regarding genuine faith. I have no problem with what we have discussed this evening. James has not presented salvation by works, but works revealed through salvation. Modern theology has so minimized the Gospel that the expectation for “believers” is not consistent with biblical truth. Works have never saved, and they never will, but those who are genuinely born again will produce works consistent with their salvation. If one professes Christ and there are never any works consistent with the new birth, I would be skeptical of their conversion.

What type of faith do you possess? I trust it is much more than intellectual or general faith. I pray you have experienced saving faith in Christ, and in Him alone.