



**“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone,”**

James 2:17

## **Faith Works**

**Lesson Aim:** To show that faith without works is dead.

**L276. Date:** July 1971. **Text:** James 2:14-26.

**Topic:** Faith: Of Believers; Works: Of Righteousness.

INTRODUCTION - That's an intriguing title, isn't it? “Faith Works!” It is not a mere catch phrase, however, it is gospel truth as this study will demonstrate.

What is faith? It has been defined as belief, complete trust, confidence, or reliance. It is reported that a missionary was at work translating the Bible into a new language in which it had never been written. He sought for a word in that language to use to translate “faith.” His search was in vain. One day as he was at work on the porch of his house, a native came in from the field where he had been working in the hot sun, entered the shade and stretched himself out on a lounge chair remarking how good it felt to rest all his weight on the chair. The missionary caught the remark and used that as his word for faith. Faith in Jesus Christ is for one to “rest all your weight” on Him alone.

What are works? It is commonly defined as bodily or mental effort; purposeful activity; labor; toil; effort put forth to do or make a thing. This concept speaks of a person investing in personal effort to perform an intended action.

It appears, therefore that faith (resting all one's weight on another) and works (physical or mental activity) are contrary each to the other. And, indeed, they are. Yet, the Bible makes it explicitly clear that “Faith Works”! This is not a contradiction of terms. It is a practical statement of Biblical truth. He who rests on the Lord also works for the Lord.

Baptists place a great emphasis on justification by faith. This is a

doctrine right out of God's word, Romans 3:28. But the doctrine of works is taught also as in Ephesians 2:10. Today's study seeks to put these doctrines in perspective.

## EXPOSITION

### I. PRINCIPLE

How many times does God need to state a truth in order for us to believe it? It would seem one time would be enough. What, then, if He states and repeats a truth and then repeats it again? Such a truth must be of supreme importance.

Here is the principle which God states three times in James 2:17, 20, 26. **“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. . . But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”**

That is God's evaluation of the matter. Is it your evaluation too?

True faith is a “resting all your weight” on Jesus. When one rests on Jesus his conduct, altitude and interest will be different. They will show his union with the Lord Jesus. Anything called “faith” which does not bring this experience of union with God and a new creation in Christ is counterfeit, empty, dead. James is right in asking whether that kind of faith can save any man, verse 14. He concludes it cannot for it is dead, inactive and useless.

The sinner is saved by Jesus Christ through faith. But the kind of faith which brings salvation is the kind which motivates to action after one is saved.

The faith that is so poor that it makes no difference in a person's words, deeds, and motives indicates that it has not centered itself in Jesus Christ and is not resting in Him.

Here, then, is the principle which underlies this study: **Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real faith.** That truth should make us tremble. Evaluate your life in the light of its implications. What a solemn word is this!

### II. ILLUSTRATION

Not content with the statement of a principle, James illustrates this truth with five parallels drawn from sacred history and practical experience.

1. Practical benevolence. — Verses 15-16 draws a picture of a Christian who is in need of the very necessities of life—clothing and food. Another

Christian sees and knows of this need. He says a kind, “God bless you,” to the needy. “May you be clothed and may you be warmed.” However, he makes no effort to provide clothing nor warmth nor food. What good can his kind words do? No good at all. On the contrary, they manifest hypocrisy in him.

Apply this principle in the realm of faith. Here is a man who says, “I know Jesus Christ. I am trusting Him as my personal Saviour.” But this man will not engage in the most elementary Christian service. What kind of faith does he have? James is very specific to say he does not have saving faith. His profession of faith is lies and he manifests a spirit of hypocrisy. Faith that refuses to work is dead.

2. Natural principle.—Examine verses 18 and 26. Here is a principle evident in nature: Life manifests itself by growth, fruit, reproduction and movement. If some man says, “I have faith but it is manifest some way other than by works.” We might well reply, “How can you manifest your faith in any way other than by works?” It cannot be done. There are some works which a living faith will produce.

It is not a question of whether one lives by faith or by works but whether one has a living faith or no faith at all. There is only one way to prove to the world that one has faith in Jesus Christ and that is by a life whose deeds are like His.

The proof of life in the body is movement. When there is no heartbeat and no indication of breath, a person is pronounced dead. The spirit has departed the body. So when there is no movement of service to Jesus, no evidence of spiritual life in a professed believer, it is reasonable to assume that he, too, is spiritually dead. **“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also,”** verse 26. This is the practical application of a principle evident in nature.

3. Demonic belief.—Perhaps some people who profess faith in God do not really understand what faith is. In response to the question, “Do you believe in God?” many people will answer, “Yes,” if they just believe that God exists. But this is not faith—not a resting of one's whole self on Jesus Christ.

To believe in the existence of God is to be equal to demons. They believe that with such surety that their hair stands on end in terror at the thought. But they are still demons. Their character remains unimproved by such a “faith.” Their belief only deepens their anguish.

Will any man be content to rest his eternal destiny on a “faith” which is only equal to that of demons? Surely not. But a “faith” which does not make a difference in a man's conduct is as dead and useless as the “faith” which a

demon possesses.

4. Patriarchal examples.—From the Old Testament scriptures the Apostle James draws two examples of faith which produced works and thus proved its validity.

(1) Examine the experience of Abraham. He believed God and acted upon that belief in such a positive way that none could doubt the reality of his relationship with God. So he was called “the friend of God.”

God promised Abraham that He would miraculously give him and his wife a son in their old age. (Abraham was near 101 and Sarah was near 90,) Abraham took God's Word for it. **“And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness,”** Genesis 15:6. Thus was Abraham “justified before God” by faith. I Romans 4:2.

In due time that promised child was born. He was called Isaac. All God's promises to Abraham of posterity and spiritual legacy were centered in that only son. When the lad was about fifteen years old, God commanded Abraham to take the boy to Mount Moriah and deliver him up as a burnt offering, Genesis. 22. Abraham obeyed the word of God. His faith in God was such that he was sure that even if God had him to kill Isaac, God would raise him from death to accomplish His purpose in him, Hebrews 11:19. He made every preparation to offer his son, even to binding the lad and placing him on an altar, but God stopped him.

It is in reference to this that James speaks of Abraham being justified by works. This experience called forth the expression of the validity and strength of Abraham's faith. It proved that his faith in God was vital and alive and real. It showed the wisdom of God in counting Abraham righteous because of his faith in Him.

Justified before God by faith, Abraham was justified before men by works. Yes, faith works. The faith that does not work is dead.

(2) Examine the experience of Rahab. It is told in Joshua 2:1:21; 6:17, 22:25; Mathew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25. She lived in Jericho at the time Joshua and the nation of Israel crossed the Jordan River to begin the conquest of Canaan. She received some Hebrew spies, sent to investigate the defenses of Jericho, protected them and sent them away in peace. To them she confessed her faith in Jehovah God.

She could have made a profession of faith in Jehovah while talking to the Hebrew spies and that could have been the end of it. But when she turned against her own countrymen, risked her own life to save Hebrew lives, hung a scarlet thread in her window to identify her house when the Hebrews took the city, she was showing that she truly believed in the God of the Hebrews. Works demonstrated real faith.

Look at the validity of faith among different people. Abraham was a venerable and honorable man. Rahab was a harlot. Yet, each placed faith in God. Each demonstrated his faith by his works. “All justifying faith, then we see, in whatever class of persons it is found, produces works, varying in kind according to circumstances, but all expressive of love to God, and trust in Him.”—Robert Johnstone. So must it be in your life and mind.

### III. APPLICATION

1. Faith professed.—“ . . . a man say he hath faith. . . ” verse 14. So should each believer confess his faith in Jesus Christ. He should confess it in public by following the Lord in baptism and being active in service through a church. And he should confess it in private in conversation with friends and acquaintances. Faith should be confessed over and over.

But James insists that true confession of faith is more than words. If a man keeps on saying he has faith, while he has no works in agreement with faith, he reveals his claim to faith is spurious. Such faith can never save anyone. It is only the faith which brings us into union with Christ so that the fruits of the Spirit are produced in our lives (Galatians 5:22) which actually brings salvation.

2. Faith perfected.—“ . . . by works was faith made perfect,” verse 22. Faith and works cooperate so that by working faith grows toward maturity. Thus the more one believes the more he works and the more he works the greater is his capacity to trust.

Many a soul-winner encourages a new convert to tell someone else about his salvation as soon as possible. The convert is encouraged to confess Christ publicly, to follow the Lord in baptism, to begin Bible study and prayer, because these works aid his growth into mature faith.

Some wit has observed that when a person comes to confess Christ and joins the church he is told to “Sit here” and never told to get up and go to work for Jesus. But he must work if his faith would mature. What are you doing for Jesus?

3. Faith proven.—“**Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only,**” verse 24. Suppose a man in your community who is a known liar, drunkard, thief, and moral reprobate confessed Christ in your church next Sunday. What change would you expect to see in him? Doubtlessly you would expect to see him become truthful, sober, honest and upright. If he did you might say, “He was saved, alright.” But suppose he did not. Don't you think people of the community would say that his profession of faith was not true? That is exactly what James is saying: “Faith which is

too weak to produce good works (change one's manner of life) is too weak to save.” And I say, “Amen!”, don't you? “I will show thee my faith by my works,” verse. 18.

CONCLUSION—Well, how do you measure up in the light of these truths? I'm glad I didn't say them for many people will surely take issue with them. But God said it and that settles it.

Here is the principle again: “Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real saving faith.” It is possible for one to have an emotional experience to religious truth and not be saved. Don't depend upon an experience which happened years ago as your sole assurance. Look instead in your own life. Does your confessed relationship to Christ make any difference in your words, deeds, and attitudes? Can you see the Holy Spirit producing in you the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, Galatians 5:22-23? Examine yourself whether you are in true faith. **“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also,”** James 2:26.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is faith?
2. What are works?
3. How are faith and works opposite?
4. How do works prove the reality of faith?
5. What is the basic principle, underlying this study?
6. How does practical benevolence illustrate the relation of faith and works?
7. In what sense was Abraham justified by faith and by works?
8. Why is the profession of a convert's faith important?
9. How do works help faith grow on to maturity?
10. How has this study helped you personally?