



**“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone,” James 2:17.**

## **Faith That Works**

**Lesson Aim:** To show that faith motivates Christian service.

**L341. Date:** June 6, 1976. **Text:** James 2:14-26.

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

Is it possible for a person to be truly saved and yet continue to live in sin, not producing works of righteousness? James 2:14-26 answers, “Absolutely not!” “. . . **As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also,**” James 1:26. Such a solemn answer to the question makes it imperative that the subject be pursued.

Two great New Testament truths relate to the study: (1) Sinners are saved by grace through faith, without works of merit. (2) Those who are saved will have good works, as the Holy Spirit works in and through them. In the New Testament, Paul emphasized the first truth; James emphasized the second.

Do not try to set Paul against James in teaching about faith and works. Both agree that faith saves. James went on to insist that the only kind of faith that saves is the faith which motivates the believer to a life of good works. All Bible revelation agrees in doctrine. Perhaps you have seen “summer lightning” at the close of a sultry day. Flashes cut across the sky, unaccompanied by thunder. It is harmless. There is no danger that such lightning will strike. The only lightning that strikes is that which is accompanied by thunder. If Paul and James were discussing faith and works, Paul would say, “Faith saves.” James would reply, “Yes, faith saves, but only that faith which is accompanied by works.” Faith which is so weak it produces no works is too weak to receive God's grace in salvation. That is the argument of today's study.

### **I. PRACTICAL EXAMPLE (2:14-18)**

A. Statement of faith (verse 14) — A man may “say he hath faith, and have not works.” He may confess his faith verbally over and over. That is well. Men should confess their faith before other men. If the confession of one's faith is in words alone, something is wrong!

What is faith? If it is bare, intellectual agreement with statements of doctrine, it can be confessed without accompanying deeds of righteousness. Since faith is a belief, complete trust, reliance, and a casting of one's whole weight upon Jesus, it makes a difference in conduct. That mental assent which is content to say “yes” to doctrine but knows no personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ will lull the soul of man into treacherous and fatal repose. Faith believes God can; faith wants God to; faith accepts that God is now doing it. Neither of the first two (mental assent or wistful thinking) are sufficient to save. Only real faith joins the soul to God.

B. Uselessness of words (verses 15, 16) — Consider a simple example: Here is a person in great need of clothing to keep him warm and food to ward off his hunger. Some pious person meets him, knows his need, and responds, “God bless you. May you be warmed. May you be fed.” That is all he does. Does his words help the person in need? Charming words are no substitute for helpful deeds!

Have you known a person who was long on talk about the “good Lord” but short on attendance at worship or deeds of service? If so, you probably marked that person as insincere or even hypocritical. An old proverb says, “Talk is cheap.” Indeed it is! Words, unaccompanied by deeds, are very weak.

C. Application (verse 17) — “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” Faith without works is as useless as a “God bless you” to a person in need, when no effort is made to supply that need. It would be better if one said nothing at all than to speak pious words which come from an impious heart and are not accompanied by pious deeds.

That is not to say that works save the soul. Emphasis in James 2:14-26 is not upon whether works save or faith saves. Emphasis is upon what kind of faith saves — faith without works, or faith which works. James insisted that the only kind of faith that saves is a faith which influences the life to deeds of good works. The faith that refuses to work is in the barrenness of death; it can never become the channel of God's saving grace.

D. Challenge (verse 18) — “... **Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.**” Faith cannot be demonstrated without works. Certain works properly belong to faith; they characterize it. How would one show that he trusts Jesus Christ as Saviour

and Lord, if he tried to do it without works? He could not. Words would be hollow and powerless, unless accompanied by deeds which agree with what he professes.

Suppose a man talked much about how he loved his wife and children. Suppose that man seldom went home to them, did not provide food and clothing for them, neglected them. His actions would put the lie to his words.

There is no way for one to prove to the world that he has faith in Jesus Christ unless his life is consistent with the will of Jesus. Dear Christian, show your faith by both words and works, if you would be a faithful witness.

II. DEMONIC EXAMPLE (2:19-20) “I believe in God,” someone says. That is a start; it is good as far as it goes. What does he believe about God? What difference does his faith in God make in him? What one believes about God is the essential matter!

One who believes that God exists, without personal faith in Him as Redeemer, is not saved. That is the kind of faith the demons possess. They even go beyond that. Believing in the unity of God, they tremble. Mortal man confesses his belief in the existence of God without particular awareness of the significance of that fact. That kind of faith will not save.

Saving faith is not mere belief that God is. Saving faith is a confidence which is expressed in personal commitment to Jesus. Such a commitment results in a new creation in Christ Jesus and a life of good works. It produces union with God in Jesus Christ. Any “faith” which comes short of that is not saving faith at all.

Surely you go beyond the faith of demons. Demonic faith only deepens the anguish of demons. Christian faith relieves all fear and accepts deliverance from sin and guilt. Exercise true saving faith — the kind accompanied by works of righteousness.

### III. PATRIARCHAL EXAMPLES (2:21-25)

A. Godly Abraham (verses 21:24) — How was Abraham justified — by faith or by works? The Bible teaches that Abraham was justified (counted as righteous) upon the basis of a faith that produced works.

Genesis 15 recounts how God promised Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son born to them in their old age. Many years of marriage without a child, they would have a son of their own. Abraham considered the deadness of Sarah's womb (well past the child-bearing years), but he also knew that God was One who resurrected the dead and made the things which

were not to exist (Romans 4:17). When there was no basis for hope, he trusted, **“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief . . . and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised he was able also to perform,”** Romans 4:20, 21. That is why his faith was counted unto him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:12). Abraham was justified before God, when no man knew of it, because he trusted God who promised.

James insisted, however, that Abraham was justified by works when he offered Isaac (the miraculously-conceived son of the old age) upon the altar to God (James 2:21-23). That was more than fifteen years after God declared him righteous upon the basis of faith. When the testing came, Abraham's faith was expressed in the offering of Isaac. If he had faltered then, he would have shown he did not fully trust God. Abraham was justified before God by faith; he was justified before men by works. So it is with you.

B. Ungodly Rahab (verse 25) — The story of Rahab, the prostitute, is recorded in Joshua 2, Hebrews 11:21, and James 2:25. Joshua 2 recounts how she hid Hebrew spies who had come to search out information in preparation of their conquest of Jericho. She hid them because she believed God would give them her native city. She believed that the God of the Hebrews is the great and true God. Her belief inspired her works. The Hebrews were convinced of the reality of her faith because of her action in hiding their spies. She was justified before God by faith; she was justified before men by her deeds.

The Bible sets forth two great examples in the discussion of justification by faith. Abraham was a good and great man who was justified before God because of his faith and before men because of his deeds. Rahab was a poor defiled sinner who was justified before God by faith and before men by her deeds. Regardless of one's station in life, justification is always the same.

Works should accompany faith. They reveal the existence of faith. They demonstrate the validity of faith. They strengthen the trust of the believer. Faith and works cooperate so that by working faith grows toward maturity.

Take heart. If you are a good person like Abraham, you can be justified by faith and become “the friend of God.” Even if you are a poor sinner like Rahab, you can still be justified by faith and become related to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek text says, “Rahab, ‘even though a prostitute,’ was justified.” There is hope for all!

#### IV. PHYSICAL EXAMPLE (2:26)

**“... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”** What a solemn statement. Read it again. Evaluate your life in the light of that truth. Medical science has gone to the courts to determine when life ceases and when death comes. Is a person who is kept alive (heart beating and breath moving) by medicines and machines truly alive? At what point does one truly die? It is difficult to determine when death has come. When no breath is detected, no pulse evident, and no brain waves present, it is assumed that one has died.

How can one determine when there is spiritual life and when there is spiritual death? It cannot be done upon the presence of a profession of faith! When the profession of faith is accompanied by works which agree with the promptings of the Holy Spirit, spiritual life is present. When profession of faith is unaccompanied by good works, spiritual death is present. Faith may pretend to be real, but it is proved true or false by the kind of works it produces. It will surprise some to hear the Lord's pronouncement upon them, **“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead,”** Revelation 3:1.

Robert Johnstone expressed the truth: “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.”

## V. FURTHER APPLICATION

Apply the principle to yourself before you apply it to another. Does your faith produce works? Are you different in action because of what you believe about God? Is your life expressive of love to God and trust in Jesus? Can you see the Holy Spirit's production in you the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Galatians 5:22)? Is your confidence based upon the emotional experience you had years ago, or is it based in the person of Jesus Christ as your Saviour? The principle is “Faith that does not produce good works is not real saving faith at all.”

Therein may be the explanation of why some people confess Christ as Saviour but never serve Him. It is very possible that their faith was not saving faith. Faith which is too weak to change one's manner of life, so that he produces those good works which God before ordained that he should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10), is too weak to save. Do you agree? James said that faith works: faith which does not work is not saving faith.

**“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own**

**selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” II Corinthians 13:5.**

This has been one of the most solemn subjects you will study this quarter. It has to do with understanding Bible doctrine and the destiny of the human soul. It explains what saving faith is. It explains why some confess faith in Christ but never live lives in agreement with the faith which they profess. It demonstrates that one may have an experience without being saved. It insists that the one sure sign of salvation is the Holy Spirit's living in a believer, and producing evidence of the life of Jesus Christ from within. Be sure that your life is marked by those good works which testify to the reality of your faith.

### Questions

1. What is faith?
2. What are works?
3. Why is no man saved by works?
4. Why is no one saved by a faith that does not work?
5. How does demonic faith differ from saving faith?
6. How can you show your faith?
7. How was Abraham justified by faith and works?
8. What does James 2:26 mean to you?
9. How is Revelation 3:1 related to the study?
10. How can you profit from the study?