

James Chapter 2 Continued

Verses 15-16: James illustrates his point by comparing faith without works to words of compassion without acts of compassion (Matt. 25:31-46).

James 2:15 "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,"

In the last lesson, we learned that works do not save you, but you will have good works, if you are saved. The brother and sister here, are not brothers and sisters in the flesh, but in the faith. This is speaking of those who are Christians. This is not speaking of wants in their lives; this is speaking of their needs.

James 2:16 "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?"

James is saying in this, that just telling them to be filled will not fill that empty place in their stomach. To wish them well, without giving them a coat to warm with will not keep them warm. We must put action to our wishes. Feed them and clothe them, and then wish them well, and you will have done something.

Matthew 25:42-43 "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:" "I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not."

Be doers of the Word, and not just hearers. Be a sermon by the actions you take toward others.

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

“Faith ... is dead ... being alone”: Just as professed compassion without action is phony, the kind of faith that is without works is mere empty profession, not genuine saving faith.

We can say we have faith, but we will not be believed, unless we have works to match up with our faith. The faith of Abraham was put into action when Abraham was about to offer his son, Isaac, as sacrifice to God.

Faith brings results. Faith causes us to step out and do things we would not think of trying otherwise.

James 2:18 "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."

“A man”: Interpreters disagree on whether

(1) “A man” is James humble way of referring to himself or whether it refers to one of James’ antagonists who objected to his teaching; and

(2) how much of the following passage should be attributed to this antagonist as opposed to James himself.

Regardless, James' main point is the same: the only possible evidence of true faith is works (2 Peter 1:3-11).

Look with me, at faith in action.

Hebrews 11:7-8 "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Hebrews 11:29 "By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry [land]: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned."

All of these Scriptures show faith in action, or faith acted upon. We must do the things of God, if we are of faith. One of the very best examples of this is the parable about the 3 men who received talents from the Lord. Two of them acted in faith and earned more for the master. The third was afraid and hid his talent. His Lord was angry and took it away from him.

Fear is the opposite of faith. To be truly faithful, we must act upon our faith. Just to sit down and say you have faith, without doing something about it, actually shows lack of faith.

Verses 19-20: The reference to faith in "one God" probably alludes to Israel's great creedal statement (of Deuteronomy 6:4);

"Hear, O Israel" The LORD our God is one LORD."

Adherence to a creed is not true faith. Even the demons know and accept the truth of the creed, but they do not possess saving faith. If one does nothing to enact his knowledge of God, he is worse than the demons, for they at least tremble.

James 2:19 "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

"Thou believest that there is one God": A clear reference to the passage most familiar to his Jewish readers; the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5), the most basic doctrine of the Old Testament.

Deut. 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength".

“Devils also believe”: Even fallen angels affirm the oneness of God and tremble at its implications. Demons are essentially orthodox in their doctrine (Matt. 8:29-30; Mark 5:7; Luke 4:41; Acts 19:15). But orthodox doctrine by itself is no proof of saving faith. They know the truth about God, Christ and the Spirit, but hate it and them.

Many believe that just to say you believe in God is enough, but without trust in God to act upon the faith, it becomes very questionable about whether you really have faith in God, or are just saying you do.

The devils believe, because they have seen God in heaven. It takes no faith at all to believe something you have seen with your own eyes. The true faith is believing in your heart in something you have not seen.

"Devils" here, is speaking of the angels that followed Lucifer out of heaven. They tremble, because they know the terrible fate that awaits them.

James 2:20 "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"

“Vain man”: Literally empty, defective. The objector’s claim of belief is fraudulent, and his faith is a sham.

“Faith without works is dead”: Literally “the faith without the works.” James is not contrasting two methods of salvation (Faith versus works). Instead, he contrasts two kinds of faith: living faith that saves and dead faith that does not (1 John 3:7-10).

Faith that is not acted upon brings no fruit.

Mark 4:8 "And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some a hundred."

Mark 4:20 "And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive [it], and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

Those who profess faith must be like this fruitful tree. Silent Christians are not fulfilling the great commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel. It is not our obligation for them to listen, but it is our obligation to tell them, if we have faith. To have faith and do absolutely nothing about it, is no faith at all.

Verses 21-24: These verses present the crux of the issue: Is a man “justified by works?” Do Paul and James contradict each other? Several factors demonstrate that they do not.

First, as already noted (in verses 14-17), the apostles use the word for faith with different meanings.

Second, they use “justified” in different senses. It is customary to identify all nuances of this word with the theological idea Paul popularized. That is, God’s act of declaring all believers righteous on the basis of Christ’s redemptive work. But a common Old Testament and gospel usage involves demonstrating or showing something to be righteous (Psalms 51:4; Luke 7:35; Rom. 3:4); it is this usage that James follows.

Third, though both men use Abraham as an illustration, they focus on different aspects of his life. Paul shows that Abraham was declared righteous by faith when he trusted God (Gen. 15:6). James declares that he was shown to be righteous by his offering up of Isaac (Gen. 22:9).

Fourth, even the terminology of these two apostles differs. Paul constantly speaks against the works of the law, as being a false use of those works to merit salvation. James, however, is speaking of works of love that follow belief.

Fifth, the two apostles are discussing totally different subjects, since they are confronted by different problems. Paul’s, opposing the Judaizers, seeks to prove that the Gentiles can be saved and sanctified apart from circumcision or any other work of the law. James, opposing merely nominal, professing Christians, seeks to show that true faith confirms itself by deeds of love.

If James were fighting Paul over law and grace, or faith and works, surely the subject of circumcision would have arisen, since it lies at the core of that issue. James and Paul are not face to face fighting each other, they are back to back fighting opposite foes!

Verses 21-26 James cites 3 illustrations of living faith:

- (1) Abraham (verses 21-24);
- (2) Rehab (verse 25); and
- (3) The human body and spirit (verse 26).

James 2:21 "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"

“Justified by works”: This does not contradict Paul’s clear teaching that Abraham was justified before God by grace alone through faith alone (Rom. 3:20; 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6, 11). For several reasons, James cannot mean that Abraham was constituted righteous before God because of his own good works:

- (1) James already stressed that salvation is a gracious gift (1:17-18): and
- (2) In the middle of this disputed passage (verse 23). James quoted (Gen. 15:6), which forcefully claims that God credited righteousness to Abraham solely on the basis of his faith; and
- (3) The work that James said justified Abraham was his offering up of Isaac (Genesis 22:9, 12), an event that occurred many years after he first exercised faith and was

declared righteous before God (Gen. 12:1-7; 15:6). Instead, Abraham's offering of Isaac demonstrated the genuineness of his faith and the reality of his justification before God.

James is emphasizing the vindication before others of a person's claim to salvation. James' teaching perfectly complements Paul's writing, salvation is determined by faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9), and demonstrated by faithfulness to obey God's will alone (Eph. 2:10).

Abraham's faith was tested to see if it was really faith, or just talk. He acted upon his faith, and God saved his son Isaac. Abraham had great faith. His faith had grown into complete trust in God. He knew in his heart, God could raise him from the dead.

Hebrews 11:17-19 "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten [son]," "Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:" "Accounting that God [was] able to raise [him] up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

Abraham's faith was strong enough to stand the test.

James 2:22 "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"

"Made perfect": This refers to bringing something to its end, or to its fullness. Just as a fruit tree has not arrived at its goal until it bears fruit, faith has not reached its end until it demonstrates itself in a righteous life.

The faith of Abraham was made perfect in the action he took. He proclaimed his perfect faith and trust in God by his actions. Had the test of offering his son for sacrifice to God never arisen, we would not have realized how great faith Abraham had in God. His act of faith helps us in difficult situations to act upon our faith.

We might be like the man who brought his son to Jesus for healing. He said he believed, but help his unbelief. Each person has a portion of faith, but to let it grow, we must use it. Our faith grows with every use.

James 2:23 "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."

This is (quoted from Genesis 15:6).

"Called the Friend of God": Abraham is so called (in 2 Chron. 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8), because of his obedience (John 15:14-15).

"Imputed", in the usage here, means counted. The belief of Abraham was counted unto him for righteousness. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Without acting upon the faith that we have, it is not faith at all. To be the Friend of God would be the highest honor we could be paid. God had great regard for Abraham.

James 2:24 "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

The works spoken of here, are an evidence of the faith the person has. Faith saves us, but the works are a by-product of our faith. When we stand before Jesus on judgment day, He will say to His own, well done, thy good and faithful servant. Servants serve.

James 2:25 "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent [them] out another way?"

“Rahab the harlot”: The Old Testament records the content of her faith, which was the basis of her justification before God. She demonstrated the reality of her saving faith when, at great personal risk she protected the messengers of God (Joshua 2:4, 15; 6:17; Hebrews 11:31). James did not intend however, for those words to be a commendation of her occupation or her lying.

Just as James presents two examples of spurious faith (verses 16, 19), he concludes with two examples of genuine faith: Abraham and Rahab. One was a Jewish patriarch of great sanctity, whose faith was perfected by his works. The other was the lowest citizen of a condemned Gentile city, whose newfound faith was dramatized by her works. No matter whether one has the mature faith of an Abraham or the baby-like faith of a Rahab, there must be evidence of that faith.

The actions that Rahab took revealed that she had faith in God. She helped the messengers, because her faith in God was greater than her fear of men.

James 2:26 "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

The point of this analogy between the body and one's faith is that both require an energizing element. The absence of that element renders the other component dead.

The spirit within the body is the real you. It is the spirit that is alive, quickened by the Lord Jesus Christ. The body is just the house that the spirit lives in here on the earth. When a person's spirit leaves the body, the body is dead. Jesus dismissed His Spirit from His body, and the body died on the cross.

The spiritual body that lives within this body of flesh is the part of us that will live on. When the spirit leaves the body, the life is gone. Faith that is not acted upon is like this empty shell of the body. Faith is not real, until the actions show the faith of the person.

James Chapter 2 Continued Questions

1. What in verse 15, lets us know these are Christians?
2. This is not speaking of _____ in their lives, but _____.

3. What had they said to the needy in verse 16?
4. Faith, without works, is _____.
5. What proves our faith?
6. Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my _____ by my _____.
7. Who were some others who showed their faith by their actions?
8. What parable does the author think is a very good example of faith at work?
9. Thou believest that there is One God; thou doest well: the _____ also believe, and tremble.
10. Why do the devils believe?
11. Who are these "devils", spoken of here?
12. What is the parable of the fruit, in Mark, about?
13. What is wrong with silent Christians?
14. What does verse 21 say, that Abraham was justified by?
15. What did Abraham believe God would do, if he sacrificed Isaac?
16. By _____ was faith made perfect.
17. How can we have more faith?
18. Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for _____.
19. Abraham was called the _____ of God.
20. What does "imputed" in verse 23 mean?
21. What is a by-product of faith?
22. What harlot is mentioned as being justified by works?
23. What did the actions Rahab took show?
24. The body without the _____ is dead.
25. Faith without _____ is dead.
26. What are the two bodies that we have?