

SAVED BY FAITH, NOT WORKS

TEXT: JAMES 2:14-26

INTRODUCTION:

1. This passage has caused much debate and confusion. I remember talking to an unsaved Roman Catholic relative about salvation by grace through faith alone.
2. The relative insisted that one is saved by faith plus works. And he quoted James 2:24 to prove his point. I showed him several verses from the epistles of Paul, such as Ephesians 2:8, 9.
3. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."
4. This Roman Catholic relative concluded that Paul contradicted James!
5. We should not be too hard on this Roman Catholic for there have been some great men that have come to similar conclusions. For example, Martin Luther believed that James contradicted Paul.
6. However, Luther did not reject Paul, so he decided to reject James. He called it "an epistle of straw" and declared that it should not be part of the New Testament!
7. However, there really is no contradiction – James and Paul complement each other. Eph. 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (cf. Titus 3:8).
8. James 2 teaches that God tests faith by good works, and that good works are evidence of genuine faith. In fact, there are many similar Scriptures.
9. "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 Cor. 13:5).

I. THERE IS A COUNTERFEIT FAITH THAT DOES NOT SAVE (2:14).

1. If a man gets caught with counterfeit money, he goes to jail.
2. A man with counterfeit faith goes to hell.
3. The story is told that the devil had a meeting with all his demons to decide how to lead men to hell. One demon suggested that they tell people that God doesn't really love them. The devil rejected that suggestion because it was quite obvious that God in fact does love people.
4. A second demon stood up and suggested that they persuade men that death ends all and there is no need to worry about eternity. This too would not do. Most people instinctively believe in an afterlife.

5. Other suggestions were made but none were approved until finally one demon said: "I recommend that we tell everyone that God loves them and there is a real heaven and a real hell, but that all a person needs to do is say you believe and keep on living in sin as you used to." They decided to use this tactic and it has proven quite successful.
6. It is just a make-believe story but it lines up with Scripture. Second Corinthians 11:14 and 15 says, "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light," and "his ministers" are "transformed as the ministers of righteousness."
7. Our Lord said in Matthew 13:25 that while men slept, the devil "came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way."
8. Tares look just like wheat, but the wheat is genuine and the tares are not. Our Lord said "the tares are gathered and burned in the fire" (Matt. 13:40).
9. Notice James says, "though a man say he hath faith..." (2:14). In other words, he says he has faith but he is not genuinely saved.
10. Not long after I was saved, I heard this statement: "There are many professors, but few possessors."
11. The Bible teaches that a faith that does not result in good works cannot save. Many nominal Christians have never been born again. Week after week they go to church and stand and sit and sing and pray and listen to sermons but they are headed straight for hell.
12. Many people say, "I believe in God" or "I believe in Jesus" but they are lost; they have never been genuinely converted. James says "the devils also believe, and tremble" (2:19).
13. Saving faith is more than mental assent to certain well-known facts concerning God. A sinner must be born again. And when he is truly born again there will be a definite change in his life resulting in good works.
14. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
15. Let's not be so eager to get people converted that we carelessly accept any kind of profession.

II. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD (2:18-20, 26).

1. A faith without works is not a real faith at all – it is only a make-believe faith.
2. Works are not the root of salvation, but they are the fruit of salvation.
3. Our Lord said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16).

4. And yet we have people who claim to be saved who give absolutely no evidence of salvation.
5. True living faith produces works. If it doesn't produce works, then it is dead, i.e. barren, useless, worthless, and good for nothing.
6. James illustrates this point by giving the example of how some insincere so-called church-goers will not one finger to help a brother or sister in need (2:15, 16; cf. I John 3:17, 18).
7. M.R. DeHaan said: "That is what is wrong today. How many times do you say to a brother in trouble, 'I'll pray for you,' and do it only to get rid of him? The world wants action, not words, and many a cheap, stingy heart is camouflaged under pious cant and hollow prayer. The world is not interested in our prayers. It wants evidence. How many souls are being kept from Christ through our inconsistency?"
8. In other words: Action speaks louder than words! The Lord puts needy people in our way so that we can help them!
9. I'm not talking about giving money to lazy loafers or to con men or to people who will waste it on alcohol or cigarettes or drugs. I am talking about helping true Christians who are in genuine need.
10. Our Lord said in Matthew 7:21, "Not every one that saith (cf. James 2:14) unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."
11. Our Lord said in Luke 6:46, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"
12. A person can understand about salvation intellectually but still make no commitment. Too many preachers are shooting for the head when they ought to be aiming at the heart.

III. WORKS ARE THE EVIDENCE OF SAVING FAITH (2:18-26).

1. Good works are the outward proof of the reality of our faith. God knows our hearts but man cannot – therefore, works give an outward expression to what would otherwise be invisible (2:18-20).
2. Note the word "shew" (2:18). To show faith apart from works is impossible. True faith and good works are inseparable.
3. James gives two examples from the Old Testament. They were justified before God by their faith (cf. Heb.11:17-19, 31).
4. But they were justified before men by their works (James 2:21-26).
5. Abraham was saved because he "believed God" (2:23; cf. Gen. 15:6).
6. But it was years later that he "offered Isaac" (2:21). This proved to men that he had true faith in God. His faith was tested up on Mt. Moriah and he passed the test.

7. Rahab the harlot was a Gentile who heard about the true God of Israel and believed in Him (Joshua 2:9-11). She gave evidence of her faith by helping the two Israelite spies.
8. James concludes by comparing faith to the human body. He likens works to the spirit. The body without the spirit is dead and useless, and so is faith without works. It is a worthless faith, not a genuine saving faith.

CONCLUSION:

You are writing a gospel, A chapter each day,
By deeds that you do, By words that you say.
Men read what you write, Whether faithless or true,
Say! What is the gospel according to YOU? -- Anon.