

## **Pt 7 James Series (Faith Made Perfect) – Faith and Works**

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney 03-28-2018

### † James 2:14-20

14 What *doth it profit*, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

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*?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

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.

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

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

We come to the most controversial portions of James' Epistle. This section alone has probably caused more debate and strife between commentators and Bible debaters than any other.

It is no secret that the well-known 16<sup>th</sup> Century protestant reformer, Martin Luther, did not have a very high view of the Book of James (as well as several others) and he called James "*the Epistle of Straw*" and said "*it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.*"

In 1522 Martin Luther published his own German language New Testament. He placed the Books of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation separately at the back of his Bible because he didn't feel they belonged in the Canon of Scripture.

Here are some of Luther's comments concerning James:

1. As I just mentioned, he said it was an "*Epistle of Straw.*"
2. He said it was *flatly against Paul's writing and was ascribing justification to works.*
3. He said *it does not mention the passion, resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ and although it mentions Christ, he teaches nothing about him.*
4. He said that James *did nothing but drive to the law and to its works.*
5. He said James "*mangled the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture.*"

Well, Martin Luther did a lot of great things and is mostly known for nailing his 95 Theses on the door of Wittenberg Castle Church, showing his opposition to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in which he came out of. So, it is sad that he is also very much remembered for his disdain for the Book of James.

Before you give Luther a very hard time though you must consider that he was a very strong believer in Grace through Faith and not works salvation. He was so concerned that works not be presented as a method of salvation that he was dead set against anything that even hinted that it was. Therefore, the Book of James became one of his axes to grind.

What I want for us to do in this study is to examine what James is saying and see if he is really teaching a works salvation, because that is what a lot of people believe and take away from this Epistle.

First of all, how many believe this entire King James Bible is inspired by God? And that every single book in the Canon of Scripture is true and to be trusted? Well, if you believe that then you have to also believe that James is an inspired by God trusted book of the Bible.

Secondly, as we have already mentioned several times in this study, the Book of James is believed to be the oldest written book of the New Testament. Therefore, the audience that it is intended for is a Jewish audience. History tells us that this James died in AD 62, so if that's the case, James never read any of Paul's Epistles because they were not written until after that.

I told you last week that if we were to put James in the historical order that it would fit into in the Bible it would be placed right after the Book of Acts. It was in the Book of Acts that we find the ushering in of the New Testament Church when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and 3,000 Jews were saved. Those people from that point on were considered the Church. Shortly after that persecution began by the Romans and the Jews became scattered or dispersed. That's why James opens up his Epistle chapter one verse one: **James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.** The twelve tribes scattered abroad are Jews. They are saved Jews but they are still Jews.

Thirdly, since James is writing to **SAVED** folks, his intention is not to teach the method of salvation. It is NOT written for the purpose of evangelizing or preaching the Gospel, it is written with the intention of teaching the actions in the lives of believers after they have been saved.

Fourthly, when you study the Bible and it's doctrines and theology you always compare Scripture with Scripture and then make a conclusion on a subject based on everything the Bible says about it. If there are 50 different passages that teach that salvation is by grace through faith and not works and you have 1 passage that you think is teaching it is faith through works, why are you going to base all of your theology on that one verse that you have obviously misinterpreted instead of the 50 others that are very clear?

With all of that being said, let's jump right in and examine the first verse of our text:

14 What *doth it profit*, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

Let's breakdown the definition of the key words in this verse:

- **Profit:** advantage or gain
- **Say:** utter, put forth, speak, proclaim
- **Faith:** persuasion, belief, moral conviction
- **Works:** deed, labor, doing, task
- **Save:** keep safe, preserve, rescue

One of the problems a lot of people have when dealing with this verse is that word "**works.**" You see, that word is used in different forms throughout the Bible. When you see the Apostle Paul mentioning works when he is dealing with how to be saved, he is referring to works of the law. The Jews were all about the law and so Paul being a preacher unto the Gentiles is stressing to them the fact that they are saved by Grace through faith and not of the works of the law. The Judaizers of that day would say otherwise. That is why Paul wrote to the Romans this: **Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the**

**knowledge of sin.** That word “**deeds**” as used here comes from the Greek word “**er'-gon.**” It is the exact same word that is translated as “**works**” in other parts of the Bible. Paul is saying you aren't saved by works of the law.

However, in the context James is using the word “**works,**” or “**er'-gon,**” he is using in more in the form of “**actions.**”

James is not implying that the method or mode of salvation is to have faith and do some work to be saved. No, he is describing how the already saved person of faith should do works or take action in order to show forth his faith.

**Example:** I believe eating healthy and exercising is good for you and will help you to live a longer healthier life. The Doctor tells me so, the medical books say so, healthy people say so. I believe it to be so. I have faith that living that way is good.

But while I believe it to be true, I do not put into action my faith in healthy eating habits. So, I can go around professing it all day long but it is obvious that I do not put forth any work because of my faith in that lifestyle and it shows; I'm overweight and out of shape so I don't bear the fruit of a believer in eating healthy.

So, what good doth it do me to say I have faith in a healthy lifestyle and have not works or actions? Can that kind of faith make me healthy? Absolutely not, it's only by taking action on those things that I can become healthy.

You see, James was dealing with a Jewish audience and one of the problems they were faced with in that day was the license the Gentiles boasted of that they were saved by Grace through faith and not of works as if they had a license to sin. James is trying to put a proper balance to it all by stressing the importance of works or actions that accompany a person's faith.

I was listening to a lecture by David Pawson and he made this great statement:

- Legalism says, we are saved by our good deeds.
- License says, we are saved without good deeds.
- Liberty says, we are saved unto good deeds.

Then he said it this way:

- Legalism says, we are going to make sure you are not free to sin.
- License says we are free to sin.
- Liberty says we are free NOT to sin.

One of the most quoted passages of Scripture in all the Bible is **Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

And that is where most people stop. That's all they are interested in, that good old grace through faith and not of works. And, that is a great thing and a true thing, however, what most people fail to do is keep reading in that passage where Paul goes on to say in verse **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

So, the method of salvation as described by Paul is grace through faith, but he follows it up with the fact that God saved us “**unto good works.**” In other words, just as James is teaching, works or action should accompany our faith, Paul also is showing us that our salvation is evidenced by our good works or our actions as a Christian.

Then James gives another real-world example for them to compare what he just said with: **15** If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, **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? **17** Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

His example is just as ridiculous as it sounds and that is his intention. It's as if a homeless hungry man came up to you and was starving, cold, and desperate and you look at him and say; “Okay brother, thank you so much for letting me know, may you find something to eat and something to wear, have a great day!” Instead of reaching into your pocket and pulling out some money to buy him a meal or take off your coat and give him to wear, you just bid him farewell. What good did that do? Did that make him warm or fill his stomach? No because you took no actions, therefore your farewell was dead because it was not followed up with any works.

Then he uses another real-life example:

**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.

Now, these verses can be confusing if you aren't careful. There are varying opinions and who James is talking about when he says “**a man may say.**” Some believe he is talking about himself saying this and some think he is interjecting a hypothetical man saying this. I believe it is a hypothetical man he is talking about.

If that's the case then we would understand these verses as James trying to show us an expected argument that may come up if someone claims that works are not part of faith. Look at it in the way of someone trying to prove they have faith.

One man claims to have faith but how can he prove it? If there are no works that follow it then it's just him stating his has faith. But the other man says he has faith but can prove it by his works.

**19** Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. **20** But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Then the same hypothetical man says to the man “you believe there is one God, well, that's good you believe it; however, the devils also believe there is one God and they tremble.

We know from reading throughout the Scriptures that he devils certainly DID believe there was one God, the believed him to be Jesus and because of that they trembled at his power. That's why in the story of the Demonic of the Gadarenes, you find the devils begging Jesus not to send them out to the “deep,” but instead cast them into the herd of swine. They greatly feared Jesus because they know that he has the power to cast them into the bottomless pit and lock the door. But, they do not have saving faith. The devils aren't saved but they believe in one God.

So, really the only way to prove your faith is genuine is if it is followed up by works. Otherwise your faith is dead.

**We are going to stop right here** because this next section may be difficult for some people to understand that James is still not teaching a works salvation. In fact, he isn't teaching about salvation at all and he's going to use the example of Abraham.

---

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version