

The Letter of James

Lesson 4

The Relationship of Faith and Works

The letter of James to a broad Christian audience is meant to admonish and convict. James is not telling anybody that they are not saved, but he is trying to convict them of their weaknesses and motivate them to live out their faith. James gives practical examples of what Christian faith looks like. So far we know that faith has joy even in trials, takes responsibility when tempted, responds positively to the Word and does not discriminate with evil motives. In James 2:14-26, he discusses the relationship of faith to works.

1. Is James chapter two addressed to Christians (2:1)? What are the two contrasts in James 2:14? Notice the repetition of "says" in 2:14, 16, 18. Is James implying that there may be a difference between what someone says and what he does? How true is the statement, "what we do reveals who we are"?
2. Remember, James is presenting a series of tests by which they can evaluate the genuineness of their faith. This is meant to convict them in order to motivate them to good works and holy living. Based on Acts 11, Acts 15:11, Gal 2 and James 1:17-18, we know James believed salvation is a gift of God received by faith and that no one was ever saved by works or keeping the law. How did Jesus explain the relationship between faith and works in Matt 5:14-16?
3. What practical example of an empty confession of faith does James give in 2:15-16? Define faith from Hebrews 11:1. Hebrews 11 gives a series of Biblical examples of faith. In each case did the person believe something God revealed? In each case did this belief (faith) move that person to action? Which came first, belief or action? Therefore, is it true that faith precedes works and works come as a result of faith?
4. In James 2:14, he draws a distinction between two different kinds of faith. The second use of the word in verse 14 has the definite article with it meaning "that kind of faith". Clearly, James is saying there is a kind of professed faith that is not a saving faith, only intellectual assent. Who else has intellectual assent (James 2:19)? Are they saved?
5. In James 2:17, he uses the term "dead" to refer to "that kind of faith". What other adverb does he use in verse 20 to explain his meaning? How should your faith be expressed and revealed (James 2:18)?

6. James 2:21-24 has long been one of the most controversial passages in the Bible. Compare Romans 4:1-5 to James 2:21-24 and explain why it is controversial.

Solution: Hasn't James been talking about the evidence of salvation and not the means of salvation? Wasn't Paul talking about the means of salvation and not the evidence of salvation in Romans 4? Didn't Abraham believe God in Genesis 15:6 and God at that time "reckoned it to him as righteousness"?

Many years later Abraham revealed the reality and depth of his belief and faith when he offered Isaac in Genesis 22:9. Clearly, God validated his faith in Genesis 15, but it was manifested and proven in Genesis 22 through works. In Romans 4, was Paul quoting Genesis 15 or 22? In James 2:21, wasn't James referring to Genesis 22? Therefore, how do you solve the controversy?

7. Since James and Paul were contemporaries, you would think we would have a record of them either agreeing or disagreeing about the means and basis of salvation. In approximately 50 A.D., the Apostles, elders and various leaders of the Church got together to decide this very issue. In Acts 15:1,5, what is the issue? Who spoke at this conference (Acts 15:7,12,13)? What was Peter's conclusion that everyone agreed on (Acts 15:11)? Years later when Paul described this conference, what was the conclusion (Gal 2:9,16)?

8. Comment on this famous quote from John Calvin, "Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone". Is this consistent with Paul's writings (Eph 2:10, Titus 3:8, 2 Cor 13:5)? Is it consistent with Jesus' teaching (Jn 13:13-16, 15:5,16)?

9. How are you saved from the penalty of sin unto eternal life in glory with God? Choose one:

- a. We are saved by works
- b. We are saved by grace through a faith that works
- c. We are saved by a hot tip from Charlie Adams on tonight's game.

10. What is the danger of believing you are saved by works (Acts 15:10-11, Luke 5:32, 18:9-14, Gal.3:10-13)?

After almost every salvation passage, what addendum is added (Eph. 2:8-9, 1 Cor 1:29-31; 2 Cor 10:18, Luke 18:9-14; Jer. 9:23-24)?

What is God's attitude toward men who hold their good works as the means of their salvation (Isa 64:6, Eph 2:8-9, 2 Cor 10:18)?

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