

Faith Without Works Is Dead

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James 2:14-26
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[14] What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [17] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

[18] But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. [19] You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! [20] Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? [21] Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? [22] You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; [23] and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. [24] You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. [25] And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? [26] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (ESV)

Main Point: True faith will result in good works

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” -- Ephesians 2:8-9

“Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” -- Galatians 2:16

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” -- Acts 16:31

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” -- Romans 3:23-24

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” -- Matthew 5:16

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” -- Ephesians 2:10

The following note from the ESV Study Bible was referenced during the sermon:

James 2:21 Abraham ... justified by works. On the surface James may seem to contradict Paul. I.e., Paul denies that Abraham was “justified by works” ([Rom. 4:2](#)), arguing from [Gen. 15:6](#) that Abraham’s *faith* “was counted to him as righteousness” ([Rom. 4:3](#)). However, James’s assertion in this verse (that “Abraham [was] ... justified by works”) is based not on [Gen. 15:6](#) but on [Gen. 22:9–10](#), where (many years later) Abraham began to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Thus James apparently has a different sense of the word “justify” in view here, as evidenced by the different Scripture passages, and the different events in Abraham’s life, to which James and Paul refer. The primary way in which Paul uses the word “justify” (Gk. *dikaioō*) emphasizes the sense of being *declared righteous by God through faith*, on the basis of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice ([Rom. 3:24–26](#)), whereas the primary way that James uses the word “justify” (Gk. *dikaioō*) here in [James 2:21](#) seems to emphasize the way in which *works demonstrate that someone has been justified*, as evidenced by the good works that the person does (cf. [Matt. 12:33–37](#)). Some others hold a similar view, which understands “justify” (Gk. *dikaioō*) here to mean *to declare someone to be righteous* because, at the final judgment, the person’s works give evidence of true saving faith. See note on [Gal. 2:16](#).

Questions for Discussion/Application

- Re-read the text, James 2:14-26. What initial insights and observations do you have from reading this passage?
- Read The ESV Study Bible note above. How would you summarize what it is saying?
- We know we are justified by grace alone through faith alone. We are declared righteous not on the basis of any merit of our own, but on the basis of Christ's merit. As we seek to live the Christian life, why then is it still important to think about the category of "good works"?
- Legalism is seeking to achieve right standing with God on the basis of our obedience to God's law. License is taking advantage of our justification. It is using our justification as a license to sin. It is saying "God will be gracious to me so I might as well sin" OR "God is gracious, which renders any talk of good works unnecessary." How is legalism a dangerous pitfall for the Christian? How is license a danger? How does the book of James help us avoid license?
- In what ways can you personally be prone to legalism and/or license?
- How can we pursue obedience to God's law without simultaneously falling into the trap of legalism? How can keeping the gospel at the center of our focus help us to that end?
- Romans 12:1 says, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."* How can a due contemplation of God's mercy given to us at the Cross, motivate each of us to offer ourselves in obedience to God as "a living sacrifice" ?
- Look closely at verses James 2:14-17. What is the point of these verses and how do they apply?
- Consider taking time to pray, asking God that by His Spirit He would help us to be motivated by grace to pursue growing obedience to the Lord in all things.

