

Theme: Faith and Works

James 2:14–26

¹⁴ What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? ¹⁷ Thus 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 without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! ²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?

²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Consider

2:14. Look back at the paragraph leading up to this verse. What would you say is the context of this question?

Rephrase the question being asked in your own words: _____

Note: The question “Can faith save him?” might be better translated “Can that (kind of) faith save him?” The issue at hand is not salvation (justification) by faith but hypocritical religion. Also remember that “save” in James means more than salvation from the penalty of sin (justification); it also points to the rescue of a Christian from destructive sinful habits (1:21).

What is the answer to the hypothetical question in 2:14?

2:15–16. Describe the scenario that James gives us.

- Who is the needy person?
- What is the response of the believer to this needy person?
- What does the believer fail to do?
- What is God’s assessment of this contrast between what is said and what is done?

Look back at 1:22. How does this verse apply to the scenario James has given us?

2:17. What do you think James means by “faith by itself”? How should we understand this statement with the clear teaching from other Scriptures that we are saved by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8–10; John 3:16–17; Titus 3:5)?

2:18–19. How can you demonstrate to someone else that you have faith? What kind of faith do the demons have? Is that saving faith?

2:20–24. James provides the example of Abraham whose faith was tested by God. The story of this testing is given in Genesis 22. How was Abraham “justified by works”?

How did Abraham’s works make his faith complete?¹² How did his works show that his faith was authentic?

In 2:23, James says the Scripture was fulfilled (quoting Genesis 15:6) when Abraham acted on this faith in Genesis 22. In between these two events, what did Abraham’s choices show about his faith?

- When was Abraham saved/declared righteous?
- When was Abraham’s internal faith demonstrated for all to see?

2:25. How was Rahab’s faith (see Joshua 2:1–21) demonstrated to be authentic? What words did she say to the spies? What did she ask them? How did her actions validate her words?

¹² This word means to bring something to an end, or to bring it to its goal / accomplishment. It carries the idea of proving something to be correct or true.

Why do you think James uses these two Bible stories as examples? Compare Abraham and Rahab and list the differences.

2:26. What does this analogy teach us about the relationship between faith and works? How does Jesus's condemnation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27–28 warn us against the danger of hypocritical outward religion without inner change?

Ask Yourself

Do I tend to show love to others through words only or with actions? How can I demonstrate love by serving others this week? Who are some of the needy people around me who need to be loved with actions?

Do I act on the faith I say I have in God? In what areas of my life do I choose not to trust Him?

A hypocrite is one who claims to believe something, but his actions reveal he believes something else entirely. According to this chapter and Romans 12:9, how should I show love to others?

Is my faith obvious to other people around me? Has my saving faith been demonstrated so that others recognize God's working in my life?¹³

According to Ephesians 2:8–10, I am God's workmanship; He has created a path of righteousness that I should follow. Are my life choices in accordance with God's purposes for me?

Cross References

Ephesians 2:8–10

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

John 3:16–17

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Titus 3:5

not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

Genesis 15:1–6

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. *I am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

² But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house *is* my heir!"

⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." ⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

⁶ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Romans 12:9

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

Matthew 23:27–28

²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Romans 12:1–2

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

¹³ A pastor once asked the question, "If you were ever convicted in a court of law of being a Christian, would there be sufficient evidence to prove it?"