



Lesson 11 August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## Faith without Works is Dead

Study Scripture – James 2:14-26

Background Scripture – James 2:14-26

### Key Verse:

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

**James 2:26**

### INTRODUCTION

In our Study we will face several important issues which have a direct impact on our daily lives as Christians.

One important issue before us is the issue which according to the Book of Proverbs is the mark of a fool. This issue is about having pride in knowledge for its own sake. This is a sign of immaturity in a church where there are persons with conversations among themselves engaging in self-serving discussions on the language of faith with hollow religious speech which is lifeless. All it does is to ignore the central teaching of the faith which is ***Love your neighbour as yourself.***

It therefore reduces faith to something which is quite small for faith is reduced to a few words like **“I believe”** while telling someone who is in great need or maybe even the homeless, **“Have a nice day”**.

The question you must answer for the world is, Where is the good news (or the gospel) ***for your neighbour?***

The other issue revolves around whether our emphasis is on Performance or whether it is on Mercy. Is there a link in our minds between genuine Christian faith and the work of compassionate deeds? Does it mean anything to us when Jesus said in Matthew 5:7 ***“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”***?

We should never look at this passage without remembering that it is addressed to people who have been regenerated, people whose life is not their own. The imperative therefore is that they are to follow their Saviour for they are to be like God. They are to do what God does. James has to deal with a well-known rabbinical citation:

**“As soon as a man has mastered the thirteen heads of the faith, firmly believing them, though he may have sinned in every possible way, he still inherits eternal life”.**

So when one writer looks at the people James addressed directly and those that are currently professing to be Christians one writer states:

**“So, he's talking about the kind of doctrine that was built upon the special privilege of the Jew which in effect says, because we are Jews, we are saved, and it doesn't make a bit of difference what we do”.**

So all we have to do now is to substitute in the comment the word **Jew** and insert the word **Christian**, who of course now consider themselves also privileged. Another writer tells us: **“James writes against those who say a believer does not need to add works to their faith (passively) because they are irrelevant (having been saved by faith) the right to encourage those who are already saved by faith to show forth (prove) their faith and salvation by their good works, pointing out that only by acting on their faith, will their faith grow and their soul (life) be saved, for although we are justified by faith alone, we are sanctified by faith-works”.**

We are reminded that when James wrote he wrote and lived in an age and time when practicing partiality was the norm. In the ancient world there were prejudices, and hatreds based on nationality, religious background, class, and a person's ethnic background so that people were permanently and routinely labelled as Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, and, lower-class or upper-class. In Israel of course you are either among those who knew the Law and followed it like Pharisees and scribes, or you are just like the other publicans, lawbreakers, and sinners.

So remember that when the early church was seen to be open to all classes and they lived in unity, this was something for great astonishment in the ancient world.

But you should also remember that this unity did not come automatically for as James showed the Apostles had to teach the early church to hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ without partiality. They should not discriminate between the poor and the rich for salvation was a free gift to all. One writer tells us that in this Book of James he would have to give 59 imperatives (command language) in the letter's 108 verses.

“Works” run throughout the entire book of James and shows how a child of God must deal with his and her faith through daily living and the expectation of his or her life.

Faith in itself can sometimes be a difficult concept to grasp. However, with the many and varied examples in the Bible, a clear definition begins to unfold. Aspects of faith are not only concerned with trust, but also in physical manifestation in action or deed. This is where faith has its truest form and strength.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states:

**“Studying the word “faith” in the light of use and contexts, ... we may distinguish the two senses as the passive and the active; on the one side, “fidelity”, “trustworthiness”; and “faith”, “trust”, on the other. In Gal 5:22, e.g. context makes it clear that “fidelity” is in view, as a quality congruous with the associated graces. (the Revised Version British and American) accordingly renders *pistis* there by “faithfulness”.) Again, Rom 3:3 the King James Version, “the faith of God,” by the nature of the case, means His fidelity to promise. But in the overwhelming majority of cases, “faith”, as rendering *pistis*, means “reliance,” “trust.”**



It may be enough here to call attention to the recorded use of the word by Our Lord. Of about twenty passages in the Gospels where *pistis* occurs as coming from His lips, only one (Matt 23:23) presents it in the apparent sense of “fidelity”. All the others conspicuously demand the sense of “reliance”, “trust”. The same is true of the apostolic writings. In them, with rarest exceptions, the words “reliance”, “trust”, precisely fit the context as alternatives to “faith.”

The word “works” or the concept of works is synonymous with actions or deeds. When one believes the word of God, then full realization of that acceptance is seen in their Christian lives. And so discussions about Paul’s ideas about faith and works will not contradict what James has said, as both discussions will always lead to a Christian who is spiritually mature (or attempting to get there), exercising his or her faith, manifesting itself in some action, to demonstrate or witness to others of that individual’s level of trust.

“In the New Testament, “faith” covers various levels of personal commitment. Mere intellectual agreement to a truth is illustrated in James 2:19, where even demons are said to believe that there is one God. Obviously, however, they are not saved by this type of belief.

Genuine saving faith is a personal attachment to Christ, be it thought a combination of two ideas-reliance on Christ and commitment to Him. Saving faith involves personally depending on the finished work of Christ’s sacrifice as the only basis for forgiveness of sin and entrance into heaven. But saving faith is also a personal commitment of one’s life to following Christ in obedience to His commands.

In his discussion of favoritism, James argued for genuineness, and warned of superficial self-deception. The larger issue is the whole matter of *faith in God*. James wrote this section to challenge his readers to examine the vitality of their faith in God. Were they really putting their faith into practice, applying their beliefs to their behavior? Their preferential treatment of some people raised this question in James' mind. Hearing God's Word (James 1:22-25) and talking about God's Word do not substitute for doing God's Word.

James and Paul do not contradict but complement one another. Paul is writing to Jews who believe that they are right with God on the basis of (1) their race (nationality) and (2) their keeping the Law of Moses (legalism).

Paul speaks of entering into the Christian life. He uses Abraham's life as an Old Testament example of being declared right with God before circumcision and before the Mosaic Law (Gen. 15:6), based solely on God's initiating grace and the appropriate faith response (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6).

James is writing to church people who are making Christianity a creed instead of a lifestyle. These folks are asserting orthodoxy as the basis for their assurance of salvation. The Books of James and I John assert that daily love in action is not an option for Christians but is the evidence of their being Christians. For James, good works necessarily flows from a ‘living faith’.



Paul and James are not giving two ways of salvation, but two aspects of one the same salvation. Paul speaks of the beginning of Abraham's walk of faith (Genesis 15), and James speaks of its ongoing characteristics (birth of Isaac versus offering of Isaac, Genesis 22).

Consequently, it is not "faith or works" but "faith and works to those already forgiving and justified." Not only is faith without works dead but works without faith is also dead (Matt. 7:21-23; John 15:1-6). Being a carnal, weak, baby Christian is possible (I Cor. 3:1-3, 10-15; Heb. 5:11-14), but it is the exception, not the norm.

The Study Text functions as an encouragement to "active faith". In a sense it is a passage on assurance— not assurance as a doctrine, but as a lifestyle. Assurance is surely a biblical truth, but only in connection with daily Christlikeness, not Systematic theology! We are saved to serve. Service is the evidence of salvation. It is never the means, but it is the goal, the fruit (Eph. 2:8-9 and 10). This truth is much needed in our day of (1) easy believism and (2) assurance as a denominational theological tenet (usually given as a dogmatic statement at the beginning of the Christian life).

The tone of today's Text is somewhat combative—James is blunt. He is not a dispassionate scholar who pontificates from an ivory tower on theories of the relationship between faith and works. The phrase *what doth it profit* intends to discover what good can come about, based on the conditions James is about to discuss.

We are not saved *by* deeds; we are saved *for* deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life. And Paul's whole emphasis is on the first truth, and James's whole emphasis is on the second truth.

Last week we saw James exhortation to be *doers of the word and not hearers only*. In the prior verses of this chapter he upbraided those guilty of partiality in the church.

In our Study Text he puts the microscope on the larger issue of faith itself and his question for us this morning is; do you have "a living faith" or "a dead faith"?

It is important for us to quickly review what one scholar calls "**the gospel of the five onlys**": **Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, by Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. So that God's salvation work is the work which he himself has accomplished**".

As we look at this Text the doctrine of justification comes up and so we have to pay attention to the doctrine that "justification" is by grace through faith. No one has something to boast about and certainly not before God. The question that will come up and which has given some believers some difficulty is whether or not James contradicts this doctrine by his insistence that faith if it does not have any works is dead, being by itself (2:17). Verse 26 also has this emphasis.



We must therefore take this opportunity to review the basic doctrines of the faith and define some terms. One scholar helps us to understand what James and Apostle Paul are really saying: **“Justification is a legal doctrine; it is grounded in the implication made possible by the penal substitution-the Lord Jesus Christ's work on the cross-on the principle of grace. That's what we have been saying, that justification is a legal pronouncement by God, possible by virtue of the work that Christ did on the cross, and through that work, but imputes to his people a righteousness that satisfies him....**

**Justification does not require the presence of good works. Now let me explain what is meant by that. When we say justification does not require the presence of good works, I am not saying that the man who is justified will not produce good works but what we are saying is that faith justifies a person when he has no satisfactory works before God. Justification does not require the presence of good works..”**

Remember therefore that God justifies the ungodly, not the godly, for their faith is considered as righteousness. So justification which God grants to us, and remember this is a legal term, does not require the presence of good works. So the scholar continues:

**“Faith is never alone in the sense that works are always produced by saving faith, but it always justifies alone. Faith is never alone, but it justifies alone...**

**Justification has no degrees. For example, we cannot say, he is justified but she is more justified. And he's most justified. Justification has no degrees. The reason I say that is because there are some who believe that once a person is justified that his life is constant growth in justification. We know of course that the Bible teaches that we grow in sanctification, but there are Romanists who believe that our justification is in degrees. It is not in degrees. And the apostle states in Romans chapter 4 and verse seven**

***“Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven”.***

He uses a tense which suggests a forgiveness that is definite and complete. So justification does not have degrees ...

Forgiveness of Sin is the Entire Justification, not Merely a Part of it. Now let me say that what I mean by this is when we say that a man is forgiven, we are not distinguishing justification from forgiveness except in emphasis. When a man is forgiven, he is justified. When he is justified, he is forgiven. Forgiveness of sin is the entire justification, not merely a part of it. I'd like for you to turn to Romans 4:7. Because I think this is one of the passages where the apostle makes it plain. We read here,

***“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not impute”.***

Now, here look at the context above, and it has had to do with justification. The context that follows has to do with justification. But

he says, in order to prove what he's been talking about—notice verse 6,

***“But just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckoned (that is, justifies apart from works)-Blessed are they whose lawless deeds have been forgiven”.***

So, for Paul, forgiveness involves justification; justification involves forgiveness”.



So therefore when you come to Christ by faith given by the Holy Spirit you are forgiven, your sins of omission, those things that you should have done but which you did not do, as well as the sins that you committed or did deliberately, are covered. You are then forgiven and justified, that is “declared righteous”, a legal term, and thus acceptable to God because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

You therefore have no reason, except disobedience to the words of Scripture, to be foolish and unnecessarily dragging your guilt for past sins along with you and suffering all kind of psychological maladies.

In addition, if we understand the doctrines of Scripture we will have very little problem understanding that James and Paul are not contradicting each other. We will hold what they both are teaching. You are justified by faith alone, and your justification will show as you are sanctified progressively. As sanctification proceeds you will work for Christ.

## THE TEXT

Verse 14. *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?* (dead faith = empty confession)

*Faith*, (Gk=pistis) ... conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man’s relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust - the religious beliefs of Christians

*Faith* as James is using the term here, is a kind of confessional faith. It is belief or mental assent to the notion that God exists.

Faith in its fullness involves a belief and trust that assume the action of a life lived in obedience to the law of Christ (Matthew 7:26; James 1:22–25).

For the purposes of James’s discussion, though, he’s using the word *faith* in a more truncated sense that some of his addressees seem to have adopted.

*And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:* Matt. 7:26

... *he has faith*... Biblical faith (*pistis*) has several aspects: (1) doctrine (I John 4:1-6; Jude 3,20; (2) personal relationship and commitment to Jesus (John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 10:9-13).

... *can faith save him?* ... grammatically this question expects a “no” answer  
This is used in an eschatological sense. Judgment will be based on:

(11) works

(Matt. 25:31; *Who will render to every man according to his deeds:*

Rom. 2:6;

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*



II Cor, 5:10;

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*

*And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. Gal. 6:7-9)*  
and

(2) Faith. *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight Rom. 3:20; (see vs.28)*

*For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Rom. 4:3; Gal.3*

This question expects a “no” answer.

There is a faith that does not save which James, calls “dead faith” in verses 17, 20, and 26 and in verses 14 to 20 he will give us 3 marks of dead faith then in verses 21–26 we get some examples of a “living faith” and the entire passage show the connection between faith and works.

It is in this passage some see a conflict between James and Paul but of course there is no conflict between these teachers.

This whole matter of true and false faith was a matter of concern for Jesus and the Apostles!

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

Some commentators have seen this example as comic in its exaggeration. “Surely,” we might say, “no one would be in a position of having no clothing or food whatsoever.”

But James may be using overstatement (hyperbole) for effect.

Another possibility is that the word being translated *naked* is intended to signify inadequate clothing or a lack of proper clothing. The same word is used to describe Peter’s clothed status before he donned his “fisher’s coat” in John 21:7 (Matthew 25:36).

*Daily food*, for its part, echoes the need noted in Matthew 6:11 and 25:35.

The seriousness of this statement would come to you if you look at the shortcomings evident in the body of Christ.

The first shortcoming is what we could call being “oblivious”, for the hungry individuals mentioned are not itinerant beggars or panhandlers which nobody knows. They are members of the church and so they are called **a brother or sister**.

So brethren, you know these people, for they sit right next to you in the worship services of the church. The Holy Spirit has given them gifts and they are contributing to the church using these gifts. You might be foolish and not consider these gifts very important but in making that assessment of their gifts you are really insulting the Holy Spirit.

Verse 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? [dead faith = false compassion]*



In reality therefore James says you're being condescending when you tell them "**keep warm and well fed**". These very words from you mean that you are well aware of what they need and yet you walk past them without any offer of help.

... *notwithstanding* ... Note, the one speaking avoids personal responsibility to act to meet the need Under the second of the two interpretations, he or she goes so far as to provide religious cover for inaction

*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

<sup>18</sup> *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.* (1 John 3:17, 18); (contrast Luke 3:11).

You can't really say that they are asking you to join them in some political movement to reorganize the economy of the nation or as one writer says "**asking for the moon**". Some food and some warm clothing isn't a particularly heavy or onerous requirement and so there is no reason not to help.

Note that you are not to avoid what you're doing and you must consider the kind of pride that you have for we can imagine that you are making these statements with saying these words with a fake smile and a pat on the head. You are saying "I have faith, I have deeds" and you think that that is the same as real kindness. You're behaving like a celebrity who one writer states waves at you and by a wave changes hunger into happiness for the wretched and the downtrodden. That is ultimate and dangerous condescension in the body of Christ.

So let us be real and understand what we are doing when we behave in certain ways with brethren in the body of Christ.

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

... *dead* (spiritually dead) ... inactive as respects to doing right

Faith that talks and does nothing in such a situation or circumstance is dead. It cannot save anyone. It amounts to nothing. So we are told:

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* Matt. 5:16

*Not everyone that says, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of My Father."*

It is not the sayers; it is the doers that God respects. Matt. 7:21. -

In John 8:30-31 Jesus reacted:

*As he spake these words, many believed on him.*

*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;*



Note, “they said they believed, and Jesus said, “Your belief is not sufficient unless it involves a new birth, (John 3) a transformation, which leads to a life of obedience.”

Valid, saving faith will be verified by fruit, and a false, dead faith is indicated by the absence of righteous actions.

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

James draws a conclusion that reiterates and strengthens his original point (vs.14). The phrase *being alone* reminds us that we are dealing with a definition of *faith* that James is opposing: mere intellectual acknowledgment or mental assent to certain truths about God (Galatians 5:6).

Now, it’s clear that many people possess that kind of faith. They believe in God, they believe in Jesus Christ, but not to the point of salvation. They may believe the facts about God, the facts about Christ, but they manifest no irrevocable commitment to Jesus Christ. They manifest no changed life that comes with true salvation marked by repentance and obedience.

Verse 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.*  
(Rom. 4)

In fact, the Book of James may be viewed a series of tests by which we can evaluate whether our faith is a “living faith” or whether it is a “dead faith”.

- a. The first test was the test of trials 1:1-13 and one’s response to trials is an indicator of “dead faith” or “living faith”.
- b. The second was the test of temptation.
- c. The third as the response to the Word.
- d. Chapter 2 is the test of our response to the poor and the needy.
- e. In 2:14 – 20, James brings up the test of works – righteous action, righteous behavior, behavior which is obedient to God’s Word, and which manifests a godly nature. How we live then proves who we are.

In the second part of his current line of argument, James describes a hypothetical conversation. A challenge is posed to James’s assertion that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead,” just stated.

11. The first conversationalist seems intent on putting *faith* and *works* into categories that do not relate to one another. The person is, in effect, arguing that faith and works can be separated without damage to either.

*Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*

There is no demonstrating of *faith without ... works* since faith is invisible in and of itself. But the works of which James is speaking are the necessary products of valid faith. Actions really do speak louder than words. The person who claims faith without works makes an absurd, empty claim.



It's possible that James is also opposing here a line of thought that contends that an emphasis on faith by itself is just as acceptable as an emphasis on faith coupled with works. James disagrees: these two options are not equally acceptable since faith and works are fundamentally inseparable (See Hebrews 11). There is no saving faith that does not manifest itself in works.

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

*"... there is one God...* This truth (monotheism) was the first test of orthodoxy for Judaism (Deut.6:4-5; Mark 12:29). Yet the demons believe this also (Mark 5:7).

Christianity is not only correct doctrine, but a relationship of obedience and love. Orthodoxy alone, without correct lifestyle, is empty (I Corinthians 13). A theological, intellectual commitment to monotheism (Rom. 3:30; I Cor. 8:4,6; Eph. 4:6; I Tim. 2:5) does not make one right with God.

Salvation through Christ affects the head (doctrine), the heart (volitional trust in Christ), and the hand (lifestyle Christlikeness).

*... there is one God ...* James presses his point by referring to what is called the Shema: *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord"* (Deuteronomy 6:4).

James is writing to Christians of Jewish background. Observant Jews of the time recited the Shema three times daily. Its teaching is still understood to be central to the Law of Moses.

Jesus agreed with that assessment when He affirmed it to be the commandment that is above all others.

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one (Mark 12: 28, 29).*

But what of the person who simply makes this confession and does nothing more?

*"The devils also believe, and tremble ...*

James affirms that the confession is correct. But then he points out that *the devils* (or demons) *believe* the same thing! They know who God is; they recognized Jesus' identity. Early in Mark's Gospel, Jesus encountered a man with an unclean spirit in a synagogue. When the man saw Jesus, the demons within him cried out, *"Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God"* (Mark 1:24).



Indeed, there is no confusion among the forces of Satan about who God is and the extent of His power. Because they recognize Him, they *tremble*. We are told of one interesting experience in the ministry of the Apostle Paul we are a demonic -spirit possessed girl testified:

*The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. Acts 16:17*

The person who claims faith without works is less responsive to God than a demon!

“Talk is cheap.” Claiming to have faith is of no significance at all if we do not act in faith. If demons can at least tremble, should not those who claim to belong to God act in ways that please Him?

Verse 20. *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* (Faith without works is useless, dead, barren)

..., *O vain man* ... In characterizing those who oppose his view as *vain*, James is calling them “empty,” which is how the same word is translated in Luke 1:53.

Behind the vanity or emptiness of those who cling to a “workless faith” lies the attempt to think that God accepts people merely on the basis that they acknowledge His existence. Were that the case, then logic would dictate that devils would be saved!

But James seems to realize that arguments from logic might not convince those who oppose his view. So he proceeds to offer concrete evidence from Jewish history.

#### **WHAT LIVING FAITH LOOKS LIKE IN REAL LIFE**

Verse 21. *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*

This question expects a “yes” answer.

...*Abraham*... He is used by both Paul (Gen. 15 quoted in Rom. 4) and James (Gen. 22) to prove their theological points, but each uses different events in his life. Paul speaks of his initial call and promises (i.e., the birth of Isaac), but James speaks of the consummation of his faith years later (i.e., the offering of Isaac).

...*our father*... This term seems to reflect Jewish Christian recipients (Matt. 3:9; John 8:39). However, Paul uses this same concept for Gentiles (Rom. 2:28-29; 4:11-12,16; Gal. 3:7; 6:16).

... *justified by works*... (be legally acquitted; be pronounced and treated as righteous)  
When one compares the lexical use of the word in the Scriptures, it becomes clear how Paul could use this term in one way (forensic sense of “made righteous”) and James in another



(shown to be righteous by one's godly living; vindication). The term is fluid enough to allow both.

Paul says that Abraham was justified by faith when he believed God's promise that he would have a child, in spite of all appearances to the contrary. Abraham believed God and was called a believer before he did any works. Paul uses Genesis 15:6 to prove that salvation has always been by faith, apart from works. (Rom. 4:1-12).

In our Text, James writes that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar (verse 21; see Hebrews 11:17-19). Are James and Paul at odds with each other? Far from it! The justification that James speaks of here is not the "justification" of salvation by faith, but rather the justification or validation of his profession of faith before men. Men do not know the hearts of other men, as God does, and so the only evidence – the only justification – of true faith is a manifestation of the fruit of that professed faith. (Matthew 7:15-27).

*... offered up Isaac...* The offering of Isaac (Genesis 22) was not the grounds of Abraham's faith (Genesis 12,15), but the result and expression.

James is using the term "works" in a different way than Paul. James is speaking of the Christian's lifestyle faith (I John),

-while Paul is speaking of a works-righteousness of the Jews (or Judaizers of Galatians) as a basis for being accepted by God

*For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they are being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Rom. 10:2-3).*

Verse 22. *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*

*... wrought ...* to work together, help in work, be partner in labour

*... perfect ...* complete, to accomplish, finish, mature, equipped for the assigned task

*... Seest thou how faith ...* manifested in daily living and how a Christian, and eventually a spiritually mature Christian will live the word in his/her life.

We are told not only to hear the word, but we are told to be doers, systematically and continually. This should be our regular way of life.

Verse 23. *And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*

*... the Scripture...* refers to Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6.

James is saying that this verse was "fulfilled" by Abraham's later actions in his willingness to obey God and offer Isaac, the son of promise, as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22).

*... the Friend of God...* the friend of God obeys God,

*You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.*



*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.]*  
(John 15:14-15);

*Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?*  
(2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8)

*... was fulfilled ...* The Scripture was fulfilled because the faith noted in Genesis 15:6 was made visible by the action of Genesis 22:1–10. The importance of Genesis 15:6 is seen in its being quoted four times in the New Testament (here plus Romans 4:3, 22; and Galatians 3:6).

*And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*  
Gen. 15:6

*... Abraham believed God ...* Abraham's obedience to the command of God on Mount Moriah placed him in the class of individuals who are counted righteous, who conform to the standard that God had set forth. For Abraham to be *called the Friend of God* reinforces what James has already said about the nature of justification.

Verse 24. *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*  
Ye... this is plural. James is now addressing his readers/hearers!  
*A man is justified... vindicate, treat as just"*

*... and not by faith only... a faith that produces no action, a valid option? James says no.* Abraham's great deed of faith was a long time in coming, but it demonstrated what God had foreseen: genuine trust in God's promise, trust that Abraham later put on the line.

*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* Phil. 2:12

To be counted righteous like Abraham, one needs the kind of faith that leads to action. James generalizes from the example of Abraham to reinforce his point.

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

*...Rahab the harlot ...* She was Judaism's ultimate proof of God's forgiveness and the power of repentance (a Canaanite prostitute, Joshua 2). She also is an ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:4). James uses two extremes, Abraham and Rahab, to prove his point.

*And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.*



<sup>10</sup> For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

<sup>11</sup> And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Joshua 2: 9-11

... *justified by works* ... Justification is not about sinless perfection on the part of the one who is declared to be just. Consider, for example, how Abraham himself tried to rush the fulfillment of God's promise by fathering a child with Hagar, Sarah's handmaid (Genesis 16).

Abraham's faith faltered at other times as well; these showed up in his actions. Though he willingly left his home for the land God was to show him, he twice revealed a lack of trust in God when he lied to protect himself (12:11–13; 20:1, 2).

Rahab, like Abraham, was justified on the basis of her faithful works—the singular act of harboring the Israelite spies who had entered the city of Jericho. In her hospitality, she provided for Israelites who were in need. In so doing, she set an example of what James calls on his readers to do.

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

... here James sums up his argument: "*Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*" Words without works are worthless; a mere profession of faith is useless without that faith being put into practice.

... *so faith without works is dead.* The comparison assumes that *the spirit* is the animating, life-giving force in the human body. This concept is found throughout the Old Testament (Psalm 31:5), as well as in the New Testament (Luke 8:55; 23:46). The analogy is new in the course of James's argument, but the point is the same as before: faith that justifies cannot be separated from works that proceed from it. *Faith without attendant works* is no faith at all.

Note the works James choose for his arguments about the works that justify; it was the life of Abraham's son that was on the line and it was the life of Rehab that was at risk!!

## CONCLUSION

In popular usage, faith often equates to mere belief, an intellectual acknowledgment of the existence of God. James shows us that true, saving faith goes much deeper than this: it touches every aspect of our lives and guides our every action.

The examples that James uses—Abraham and Rahab—highlight these points. Consider that it was not Abraham's mere acknowledgment of God's promise that justified him. Rather, it was his action on the basis of that promise that justified him.



Likewise, it was not mere verbal acknowledgment of the Israelites' God that justified Rahab (Joshua 2:8, 9). That acknowledgment went hand in hand with her actions in sheltering Israelite spies from certain death (2:2–4). She undoubtedly risked her own life in doing so.

Note that our faith in Christ alone which brought forgiveness and justification means that we stand in the grace of God and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit and so what one writer calls the monster of uncertainty has been overthrown.

We are being progressively sanctified and that will not be completed until we reached the presence of God. Faith and justification brings with its spiritual change and unfailing fruit. We stand in salvation.

