

## THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

### JAMES 2:14-26, FAITH TEST 3: WORKS

- A. What saving faith is not (14 - 19)
1. It is not faith without works (14 - 17)
    - a. A loaded question (14), *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?*
      - 1) Robertson considers verse 14 a rhetorical question, almost of impatience.
      - 2) It is a third class conditional clause
        - a) It presents a statement as uncertain for the sake of argument.
        - b) *what good is it?*, what is the use of a man claiming he has faith when he does not have works?
        - c) The structure in Greek expects a *no* response to *can that faith save him?*
      - 3) *that faith*
        - a) *that*, an important qualifier not in KJV translation.
        - b) That faith refers to a faith with no works.
        - c) A. T. Robertson, *It is the spurious claim to faith that James here condemns.*
        - d) Manton, *He that has faith is certain of salvation, but this is not so with those who claim to have faith. In this whole discourse the apostle shows not what justifies but who is justified; not what faith does, but what faith is. The context does not show that faith without works does not justify, but that assent without works is not faith.*
    - b. A chilling illustration (15 - 16), *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?*
      - 1) An obvious need (15)
        - a) *is poorly clothed*, a special word for the verb *to be*, a look back to a condition which continues into the present.
        - b) *lacking daily food*, note the importance placed by Jesus on this need, Matthew 6:11, *Give us this day our daily bread*,
      - 2) A deficient response (16)
        - a) *Go in peace*
          - 1] This ends the conversation.
          - 2] Nothing is to be done to meet the need except the gift of a hollow blessing.
        - b) *be warm and be filled*
          - 1] The response is in the form of a command with no provision of resources.
          - 2] A. T. Robertson states, *Instead of warm clothes and satisfying food they get only empty words to look out for themselves.*
          - 3] Rabbis advised those unable to provide relief at least to speak words of comfort, *My soul goes out to you because I have nothing to give you.*
          - 4] Manton states, *Words show that you know about your duty; mere words show that you lack a heart to carry out your duty.*
        - 3) A proper response
          - a) 1 John 3:18, *Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*
          - b) Philip Hughes well illustrates this truth with the following story, *An English preacher happened across a friend whose horse had been accidentally killed. While the crowd of onlookers expressed empty words of sympathy, the preacher stepped forward and said to the loudest sympathizer, "I am sorry five pounds. How much are you sorry?" Then he passed the hat.*
      - c. A strong conclusion (17), *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*
        - 1) James clearly states his position on the relationship of works to faith not only here but in verses 20, 24, 26.
        - 2) Faith without works is a dead or useless faith.
        - 3) Faith is not independent from behavior.

2. It is not a creed without conduct (18 - 19)
  - a. A challenge to show real faith (18), ***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.***
    - 1) Works is a validation of faith
      - a) Jesus validated Himself by his works, Mt. 11:2-5, *Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.*
      - b) Faith is validated by works, Matthew 7:15-20, *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*
    - 2) No works is a validation of no faith, Mt. 25:41-45, *Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'*
    - 3) The challenge is not faith versus works
      - d) A. T. Robertson, *James is not discussing works as a means of salvation but works as proof of faith.*
      - e) Thomas Manton, *Deeds are not the foundation of faith but the evidence of it.*
  - b. A rebuke of identifying belief as faith (19), ***You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!***
    - 1) Saving faith demands intellectual assent to truth.
      - a) *You believe that God is one*, is excellent theology, Deuteronomy 6:4, *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*
      - b) Demons believe that God is one.
        - 1] They do more than just believe that fact, they shudder at the thought of it.
        - 2] *Shudder*, is only used here in the New Testament, originally it meant *to bristle*.
        - 3] Demonic responses to the person and work of Christ, Luke 4:34, *Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.*
    - 2) Saving faith demands an emotional response to truth.
      - a) Christ not only died to make payment for sins, He died to make payment for my sins.
      - b) William Tyndale, *The devil believeth that Christ died, but not that he died for his sins.*
    - 3) Saving faith demands a volitional response (acceptance by choice).
      - a) The message of the Gospel is truth for individuals in need.
      - b) It must be personally received.
      - c) Thomas Manton, *God's attributes, which are in themselves terrible and dreadful to a sinner, bring us comfort and sweetness when they come to us through Christ.*
- B. What saving faith is, as seen in the lives of faithful people (20 - 26)
  1. A reminder that faith without works is useless (20), ***Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?***
    - a. A description of those who consider that works are not tied to true faith.
      - 1) Such a person is *foolish*, literally, *empty*.
      - 2) Such a person's faith is *useless*, as money which yields no interest or land laying fallow.
    - b. D. EdmondHiebert, *It denotes not one unavoidably unemployed but one who avoids labor for which he should assume responsibility.*

2. Illustrations of those whose faith was affirmed by works
  - a. The patriarch - the life of Abraham (21 - 24)
    - 1) Obedience as a work of faith (21 - 23)
      - a) *justified by works* (21), ***Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?***
        - 1] Genesis 22:9-12, *When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."*
        - 2] How can James' interpretation be reconciled to Romans 4:1-5? *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,*
          - a] Paul is talking about the faith of Abraham before his circumcision (4:10) as the basis of being set right with God.
          - b] James points to the offering of Isaac on the altar as proof of the faith that Abraham already had.
          - c] Thomas Manton, *In Paul's sense a sinner is absolved; in James' sense a believer is approved.*
        - 3] Definition of justification
          - a] It always means *to declare righteous* not *to make righteous*.
          - b] Paul speaks of Abraham's first declaration of righteousness by God.
          - c] James speaks of Abraham's second declaration of righteousness by his works which gave testimony of the faith he already had.
          - d] Thomas Constable, *Works do not always evidence faith (v. 19), but sometimes they do. They do whenever a person who has become a believer by faith continues to live by faith. Abraham is a good example of a believer whose good works (obedience to God) bore witness to his righteousness.*
      - b) *faith was completed by his works* (22), ***You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;***
        - 1] Zane Hodges on *completed* or *perfected*, *The Greek word suggests development and motivation. Faith is thus nourished and strengthened by works.*
        - 2] James Adamson, *This does not mean ...that a faith previously defective was made perfect by works as a kind of addition from without...The force of the statement seems to be that faith is fulfilled, strengthened, and matured by exercise.*
        - 3] Works are the spiritual exercise for saving faith - his works made his faith stronger.
      - c) *the Scripture was fulfilled* (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.***
        - 1] *Scripture was fulfilled* (became abundantly clear) when Abraham offered Isaac.
          - a] Genesis 15:6, *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*
          - b] Genesis 22:16-18, *...because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, 18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*
        - 2] The progress of Abraham's faith won him the title, *God's friend*.
          - a] Obedience brings blessing and confirms faith.
          - b] Works is an exhibition of justification not the basis of justification.

- c] Faith evidenced by works is the basis for such a title for believers today, John 15:14-16, *You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*
- 2) Interrelationship of faith and works (24), ***You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.***
- a) *justified by works and not by faith alone* 24a
- 1] A. T. Robertson, *is shown to be justified.*
  - 2] Thomas Manton, *Obedience is not the condition of justification but the evidence.*
- b) Reconciliation of James and Paul (Thomas Manton)
- 1] Paul deals with the cause of justification but James deals with the effects of justification.
  - 2] Paul shows how one is justified and James shows how one gives evidence of justification.
  - 3] Paul addresses justification as acquittal from sin but James for acquittal from hypocrisy.
  - 4] Paul takes justification as the imputation of righteousness but James as the declaration of righteousness.
  - 5] Paul speaks about the role of faith but James about the quality of faith.
  - 6] Paul pleads for saving faith while James pleads against mere assent.
  - 7] Paul speaks of justifying the person while James speaks of justifying faith.
- c) Philip Hughes, *There is no real contradiction between James and Paul regarding faith, for Paul's teaching about faith and works focuses on the time before conversion, and James' focus is after conversion.*
- d) Douglas Moo, *Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works.*
- e) Laney, *While Reformation theology affirms that faith alone saves, it affirms with equal conviction that the faith that saves is not alone.*
- f) Scripture teaches that genuine faith is evidenced by works.
- 1] Matthew 3:8, *Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*
  - 2] Matthew 7:18-20, *A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*
  - 3] Acts 26:20, *...but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.*
  - 4] Titus 1:15-16, *To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.*
- b. A prostitute - the life of Rahab (25 - 26)
- 1) A change of allegiance (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?***
    - a) *and in the same way* reminds one of the previous example of Abraham.
    - b) If one can't relate to the patriarch maybe one can relate to the prostitute.
    - c) Thomas Manton, *Rahab is an example of the weakest faith...Those who set out late for heaven often make more way than someone who professes faith early on.*
  - 2) *faith without works is dead* (26), ***For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.***
    - a) Hiebert, *An inactive faith, entombed in an intellectually approved creed, has no more saving power than a lifeless corpse.*
    - b) Thomas Manton, *Never think of living with Christ unless you live in Christ; and no one lives in Christ unless he bears 'much fruit...Where there is life there will be action.*

- c) John 15:5-8, *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples*

## CONCLUSION

- A. Look back: Hooker, *God doth justify the believing man, yet not for the worthiness of his belief, but for His worthiness Who is believed.*
- B. Look forward: Matthew Henry, *There is no way to show we really believe in Christ, but by being diligent in good works, from Gospel motives, and for Gospel purposes...Faith is the root, good works are the fruits; and we must see to it that we have both.*
- C. Look at myself: Faith is based in God alone. The reality of my faith is evident in me alone.