

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

JAMES 2:14-26

LESSON: FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD—February 4, 2018

HISTORY:

James' teaching here is that he can't understand why the believers are showing favoritism in the church; treating rich visitors with great respect and treating poor visitors with no respect. It was the rich who persecuted them and ridiculed their Savior. But, James exhorts them to obey the "royal law" in the Scriptures. But, if they offend in one point, they are guilty of all; they break this law, they break all the laws; and to show no mercy is to receive no mercy. Therefore, true freedom is to obey God and do what pleases Him. Talk and act like a person expecting to be judged by the rule that sets him free.

INTRODUCTION:

The greatest tragedy of the church today is, that people who profess Christ, yet do not live for Christ. Millions profess Christ and they are baptized and confirmed and made members of the church, but they do not follow nor live for Christ. They do not live pure and righteous lives, nor do they give all they are and have to reach the lost and needy of the world. Are they saved? Do they have a genuine faith? This is the discussion of this passage. This is the second temptation that is common to all Christian believers: the temptation to profess faith without works.

LESSON: I. A QUESTION ABOUT FAITH JAMES 2:14-16

2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?— Two pertinent questions are asked.

1. What does it profit, a believer, who says they have faith and do not display works? The man says he has faith, but it is only what he says. His faith is only a faith of speech, not behavior and life. His faith is only a faith of profession, not of possession. And that is false profession.
2. Can faith save him? This is saying, can that type of faith save him. James does not contradict Paul. Both affirm that true saving faith results in a changed life as evidenced by works (Eph.2:8-10). The works of a believer speak to the world of the faith he has. God will not recognize this type of faith because it would seem that the believer does not truly believe the truths he claims to believe.

This kind of Faith that has no works does not bring salvation to that person. There is no benefit at all in that faith, so, the answer to these two questions is "No!" A believer who says they have something does something; he acts out what he believes because it's in his heart to do. The subject here is the nature of real faith. Is the church living for the world and self or are they living for Christ?

2:15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,— This speaks of a brother or sister being believers in the faith in need of the proper clothing, and impoverished of their daily food. They are unable to properly dress themselves to stay warm, and to secure enough daily food.

2:16 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?— The Message Bible puts it

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plainly: ...you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? All we can say is go in peace, stay warm, and be filled. We just share words of comfort with them; we just seem to visit, comfort, and wish them well. Is that what we do? James is saying, what does that profit if we don't give them the things they need—something to keep them warm or food to eat. If we are only talking about what we should do and not reaching out to help the destitute of the world just as Jesus did, our faith is dead; utterly meaningless, and does not profit us or the other person.

II. COMPARISONS WITH FAITH JAMES 2:17-20

2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. James calls this dead faith—faith having not works:

- *a dead faith* (Jam.2:17, 20, 26).
- *an unprofitable faith* (Jam.2:14).
- *a vain, empty faith* (1Cor.15:2).

Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense? It is not enough to claim that we have faith and not live for Christ. We must really believe that He is the Savior and Lord of our lives and do what He says. We are to live a Christ-centered life and not a Christ-titled life. Faith by itself is dead. True faith is an operative faith, showing forth works.

2:18 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. James is painting the picture with only two sentences: **First.** *"You have faith and I have works."*

- **A man claims he has faith. His Belief:** He believes he is saved by faith; God accepts him because he believes in Jesus Christ even if he fails to live for Christ and believe God has accepted him and will take him to heaven when he dies. The Word says: *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" Matt.7:21.*
- **A man claims to have works. His Belief:** God accepts him because he does good works and lives as good a life as he can. He believes that the important thing to God is to be religious and do all the good that a person can. If a person does sin, God will never reject him; God will accept him no matter who he is and no matter what religion he follows. The Word says: *"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" Matt.4:22.*

James pulls no punches: To profess faith alone will not save a person and to follow works to become acceptable to God will not save a person. James handles this with one clear statement: *"Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."* You ever heard the statement—*"the proof is in the pudding?"* It may look like pudding, but until I take action to taste it, I won't know. *"The truth of something can only be judged by putting it into action or to its intended use."* You profess to have faith, now where is the proof; back it up. No man can come to Christ and remain the same. The proof is only in our actions we profess.

2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. ¹There are some who say that belief in one God is good and sufficient. It is true that there is one God. He is the only God and there is no other. They do well to believe in the one true God. It is good but, by itself, it is not enough. The demons know that God lives and that he is all-powerful. Their belief is not merely

¹ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/james-lbw.htm>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

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words or thought. It has a real effect on them. They believe and tremble with fear. They are in terror of God. It makes them certain of their own terrible end. They know that one day God will destroy them. He will destroy them because they are not willing to obey him. To say that we believe is of little value if it does not produce good works. Real faith unites people to God. It does not cause them to tremble, but leads them to love God and do good works. Faith is in the heart and the mind. And it shows itself in a changed life, which wants to obey God.

2:20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?— James is saying, oh, foolish, senseless man, you need to know that faith without works is dead? Faith without works is not producing anything. Lives become void to achieve what's needed because your life is not producing any works. This is the same as no prayer—no power! When there is no action upon your faith, it brings no fruit; it's dead. Faith must lead to good works or else it is of no use. It is dead faith!

III. ILLUSTRATIONS OF FAITH JAMES 2:21-26

2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?— We know that a person is justified by faith. "*Justification*" is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous on the basis of Jesus' finished work on the cross. It is not a process; it is an act. It's not something the sinner does; it is something God does for the sinner when he trusts in Jesus. Here, Abraham is justified by works. How was Abraham justified by works, when he had already been justified by faith? From the very beginning by faith, he was justified before God and his righteousness declared—he believed God and left the city of Ur of the Chaldees. Now, by works, he was justified before men and his righteousness demonstrated— when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar. It was a faith that needed to express itself by works. This proof of faith did not lead to salvation, for he was already saved, but he was justified; proved righteous by the works that he did because of his faith. His works showed his faith

2:22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?— We have just seen in the above verse that Abraham was justified by faith and works. James shows that he who professes that he has faith, must prove the reality of his faith by his works. Abraham's faith produced his works and his works was made perfect (complete). His faith and his works worked together.²The action of offering Isaac matured Abraham's faith. His faith moved from a conviction that God would overcome his old age to produce a child, to the conviction that He could raise his son from the dead. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, but then you have to apply that faith; exercise it for it to mature.

2:23 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. "*And the scripture was fulfilled.*" What scripture? The scripture in the OT, Genesis 15:6— "*And he believed in the Lord: and he counted it to him for righteousness.*" These words were declared 30 years before Abraham ever offered up Isaac. The action of Abraham's belief was fulfilled (became evident), thereby, proving the truth of these words. "*Imputed*", means counted. "*Counted*" is a legal or financial term, meaning to put to one's account; credited. Abraham trusted and believed God and God credited righteousness onto Abraham's account. He did not work for this righteousness; he received it as a gift from God. He is called "*the Friend of God*"

² <http://versebyversecommentary.com/james/james-221b/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

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meaning God having a high honor and a great regard for him. John 15:13-15 tells us *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."*

2:24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. You see faith brings us salvation, and active obedience (works) demonstrates our belief is genuine which brings us back to the first topic: Faith without works is dead, and the 17th verse, *"Even so forth, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."* True faith is what God accepts and has to be lived and acted upon. Ephesians 2:8 says *For we are saved by grace through faith...*, but the works are a by-product of our faith. Works do not procure our salvation but they do declare it to others. Ephesians 2:9-10 says *"Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."* Faith in Jesus Christ is necessary to save a person but it is not faith on its own. The works of a man is justified because it's done with true faith

2:25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?— This is another example of faith in action—the converted harlot, Rahab, who proved her faith by works. Even the lowest person who claims to believe in God cleans up their lives when following God and will manifest good works. She protected the Israelite spies as they were hunted down by the Jericho soldiers. Why? – Because she believed in God and His promises. She exercised dynamic faith: her mind knew the truth, her heart was stirred by the truth, and her will acted on the truth. Therefore, she proved her faith by her works; putting her faith to work.

2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. The scenario of a body without the spirit or breath is dead and does not move, act, live, or work; it's empty, useless, and worthless, so it is with faith without works. Faith without works is dead because it does not move, act, live, or work; it is also empty, useless, and worthless. It does not live for Christ because the lack of works reveals an unchanged life and a spiritually dead heart. Faith without works is dead because it does not follow nor manifest works in reaching people and meeting the needs of a destitute world.

SUMMARY:

³Faith without works cannot save one. That's why the questions are asked, what does it profit...? And can faith save one? Is there any profit to tell a naked and destitute man to depart in peace be warm and filled, and not give them what they need? **(2:14-16)**.

A man may say he has faith but not have works. Thus faith by itself, without works, is dead. Faith is shown by one's works. It is not enough to claim to have faith. The devils believe in God, and tremble **(2:17-20)**.

Abraham, the friend of God was justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. His faith was working with his works, and by them perfected his faith. By his works the Scripture was fulfilled that declared him faithful and righteous. Rahab, the harlot was justified by works when she hid the spies. Thus faith without works is dead, just as the body without the spirit is dead **(2:21-26)**.

³ http://executableoutlines.com/ja2/ja2_02.htm
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>