

James 2:14-26

Faith and Works

The relationship between faith and works is challenging. How do they fit with salvation? This is a critically important doctrinal truth that has been distorted. Let's figure out what the Bible has to say on the subject of faith and works and salvation.

What does Paul say in Ephesians 2:8-10? "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

- How are we saved according to Paul?** By God's grace and through our faith.
- What role do good works play in the salvation experience?** None. Otherwise we could boast—did my share, did pretty good, gave 110%, deserve to go to heaven.
- Paul explains the role of works in the life of a Christian. How do they fit?** *After* being created *in Christ* (not just created) indicates being saved. Created to do (*for the purpose of doing*) good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Note the sequence: created in Jesus *first*, to do good works *second*, which are a product of our relationship with Jesus.

What does James ask in verse 14? "Can such faith save him?" What's the answer James expects? No! Why not? "Such faith" is not a genuine, saving faith. Verse 17 says dead faith produces nothing, no fruit, it cannot save. Faith alone saves us, but it must be a *living faith*. Genuine faith will produce good works. It will be accompanied by action. Verse 17 says we can tell if faith is *alive* by seeing if it is accompanied by works, and if it does not have works, it is dead/no value/useless. We will be known by our fruit.

What kind of faith saves? Faith that is living and produces good works

What is the point of verses 15-16? Futility of words without deeds. Like faith without works, words without deeds are empty and meaningless. There is no practical outworking of this faith.

Verse 18 supports what James just said—that good works are a necessary sign of saving faith. Deeds are evidence of faith.

Verse 19 says: you profess to believe that there is one God. That's good. But it doesn't prove you have saving faith. Even the demons believe what you believe, and you would have to admit that they certainly do not possess genuine, saving faith!

- Who are the demons?** Fallen angels, Satan's squad
- What do they believe?** There is one God
- What is wrong with the demons' faith?** They know the truth that there is one God. They believe, but do not surrender to the person of Jesus Christ. This is not saving faith, but head belief, mental assent. They have no works to validate their faith, just like human faith that produces no good deeds.
- Why do they shudder?** They know that judgment is unavoidable and there is no way out.

What about non-Christians who do good works? Lots of people do good things. Doesn't that count in God's eyes?

Isaiah 64:6 "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."

Isaiah 57:12 "I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you."

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Can you imagine how devastating it would be to hear those words?!

Remember what Ephesians 2: 9 says about being created in Christ Jesus (*not just created*) to do (*for purpose of doing*) good works. You have to be in a right relationship with Jesus to do good works that have value in God's eyes. Good deeds not motivated by a living faith are of no value in the eyes of God.

If works are not designed to save us, what are they for? To bring honor and glory to God. Works are not about us, but an expression of appreciation to God for what He has done. They give evidence of being saved. If you're doing works to earn or deserve your salvation, you're bringing glory to yourself. Your motives are wrong.

Verses 21-24: Abraham

The faith: Abraham was declared righteous (saved) when he believed God's promise in Genesis 15:4-6. "Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." At this point Abraham was saved—in a right relationship with God.

The work: What followed was a many-year gap before God's word was fulfilled. Work was done that validated the faith.

The relationship between faith and works: **Abraham was justified** by what he did because it validated his faith as complete and living.

Justified = declared to be righteous, acquitted, not guilty, set free! We are justified when we trust Jesus to be our Lord and Savior.

Righteous = being in a right relationship with God.

Verse 25: Rahab

What did Rahab's actions demonstrate? She had made a choice between the pagan idols of Canaan and the God of the Hebrews. Her heart had been changed. She had placed her faith in the God of the Hebrews and her faith resulted in action.

Rahab confessed, "For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Joshua 2:11). Her profession of faith was justified (validated) when she followed through with her promise by letting the men down the wall of the city with a rope. Her profession was proven to be genuine by her practice. Her faith preceded her works. Her faith was the basis for her works.

These two examples (the father of the Jewish nation versus a Gentile prostitute) emphasize the point that:

Faith + works does not equal salvation.

Faith + nothing equals salvation + works.

If you think you have to contribute, in essence you are saying the cross is not enough. "I have to do my part," is an insult to God.

Martin Luther objected strongly against the book of James. He wanted it removed from the Bible, thinking it promoted salvation by works.

As Christians, we have to know what the truth is. There are eternal consequences.

"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:8-9). Salvation by works—or anything else besides grace—is "another gospel."

James is dealing with sanctification primarily, not justification, here and throughout this epistle. This is Christian life teaching, not teaching on how to become a Christian.

If you had to work to earn/retain your salvation, what problems would you encounter? How much is enough? How do you know when you have arrived? Constant state of worry. Wrong motives, trying to earn God's favor. How do you get it back once you have lost it?

"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28).

"David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works" (Romans 4:6).

"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:21-24).

"Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent'" (John 6:28-29).

MEMORIZE: James 2:18