

works. Abraham was justified twice. Once by his faith, which Paul talks about in Romans, and the other by works, which James speaks of.

The Genesis 15 account of Abram being considered 'righteous' was not because of the actions of his works. God had asked him to believe the promise concerning his descendants. This Abram did. His faith was counted to him as righteousness. This is the situation that Paul describes in Romans 4. Abram did not do anything except to believe. His faith needed to be established before his works could be accounted for.

At a later point in time, God required Abraham to sacrifice his son. We read in Genesis 22 that Abraham took his only son Isaac to the mountain in order to follow God's command of offering his son to the Lord. This must have required great faith because of the details of the first promise that Abraham had received concerning his numerous descendants. Abraham's confidence in God was so strong that he even prepared Isaac by tying him to the altar and raising the knife to kill him. This is the reality of Abraham's faith. His faith combined with his actions, and therefore his faith in God was made perfect. Abraham's faith was complete and whole.

Abraham's faith partnered with his works, and by his works his faith was made complete. One translation reads, *"Isn't it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are 'works of faith'?"*

2:23. And the Scripture was fulfilled – The original Greek here reads that 'the Scripture was completed'. Other words and ideas that can be transposed here are; made whole, accomplished, achieved, and consummated. *The Scripture was fulfilled, not Abraham's justification.*

2:23. which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." – James is quoting Genesis 15:6. Abraham had been justified at this time, which teaches us that justification is by faith and not by works. Abraham only had to believe God at that particular time – there had been no works accounted to him at that point. After he had declared a faith in God, and his 'faith tree' had been planted, the fruit of works were to blossom. Abraham's true faith resulted in obedience to the things that the Father had required of him. It was the combination of faith and works that resulted in his justification. Works alone will not justify a man (Rom 3:28, Gal 3:11; 5:14). Faith alone will not justify a man. Faith by itself can be considered to be an opinion or speculation – a mere act of the mind to believe.

Genuine living faith is the act of combining beliefs with actions; By faith Abraham was justified before God and his righteousness declared. By works, Abraham was justified before man, and his righteousness demonstrated

#### **Rahab**

If Abraham was the one who would have been considered righteous in man's eyes then Rahab would have been completely the opposite. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who lived in a house that formed part of the wall at Jericho. Joshua's two spies lodged with her and she protected them by hiding them in her roof when the King's soldiers pursued the spies. She knew that Jericho was about to be overtaken by the Israelites and so she asked for protection for herself and her family.

Rahab had both faith and actions. She had faith in the one true God. "The Lord your God, He is God in heaven about and on earth beneath." She is recorded in the famed Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:30 as one who was saved because of her faith. Her faith was real because it resulted in good works. Faith was the cause of her actions.

The principle of faith and works combining is again demonstrated in this passage. As a result of her true faith she was included in the royal line of Christ, being David's great, great grandmother (Matt 1:5).

No matter whether Jew or Gentile, the principle of combining faith with works is important for all. It is a requirement to show that a true faith in God is outworked through actions that glorify Him. 2:26. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. – When a body and a spirit unite there is life. When a body and spirit separate there is no life. Whether a body is alive or dead it is still a body. If a body doesn't have a spirit then it is a dead body - a corpse that is useless. Likewise a person may be able to describe his faith and profess that he has faith but without actions it is dead and useless – a corpse.

Faith is the body. Works is the spirit. Without the two operating together there is no life. How can we check that there is life in the body of faith? As in a natural body where one checks the pulse to determine whether there is life or death, so too by checking the pulse of the works of the Spirit one can check the life in the faith. If there are no works, there is no life that can be attributed to the faith professed. We are all to have a faith that projects works – a dynamic faith.

# AGAPE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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### THE FAITH TREE

JAMES 2:14–26

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## James 2:14 - 26 Faith and Works

The great debate of faith versus works is often a very misunderstood principle of scripture and some people often get this doctrine confused. They take the writings of James and Paul and then side with one of them. Quite often what James has to say about the faith-works equation is pushed to the side in favor of the more preferred approach by Paul; "A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28), whereas James wrote that faith without the deeds of the law is dead faith.

Martin Luther even went so far as to dismiss the book of James by placing it in the appendix of his 1522 edition calling it an 'epistle of straw'. James and Paul were writing of the same doctrine and they were in agreement. Both however were writing to different audiences and different cultures. This is where mistakes of interpretation occur. We will find that it should no longer be a question faith versus works but a joining together of faith and works.

James takes this next passage in his letter to explore faith. He dissects it and provides the reader with examples of three types of faith. (1) Dead faith vs. 14-17; (2) Demonic faith vs. 19; (3) Dynamic faith vs. 20 — 26

I. **Dead Faith** 2:14. What does it profit my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

James begins to now introduce the issue of faith-works. The word 'faith' appears here in this passage some 11 times, while the word 'works or working' appears 13 times. While we must have faith the true outworking of that will be in our works.

What does it profit - What does a person gain? Why is it beneficial? What good is it?

*My brethren*, - there is that intro again, "my brethren – James continues to remind us that he is talking to "us."

if someone says he has faith but does not have works? – The Amplified version of this verse is put forward as this; *What is the use (profit), my brethren, for anyone to profess to have faith if he has not [good] works [to show for it]?*

The key word brought out in this passage is 'profess.' The people James is writing to claim they have faith. He is dealing with people who claim to already be forgiven and in a relationship with Christ. James (and the church) has a cause for concern when these people that claim and profess to have a relationship with God do not display their faith through good works.

A tree will only bear the fruit that it has been created to bear. Apple trees will not produce lemons, and an unhealthy tree will not produce any fruit of quality, if at all. Likewise Christ considered the human soul to be a tree of faith. A healthy tree of faith will bear

fruit of good works. An unhealthy tree of faith will produce either superficial works, or none at all. The quality and appearance of fruit will either confirm or deny the reality of faith in a person.

Can faith save him? – **James has connected the two ideas of faith and works together.** One cannot be without the other. The question posed here is not "can faith save him?" No, it is more clearly can THAT faith save him and THAT faith is "dead faith" The King James Bible Commentary has this to say concerning this verse;

*James does not state that the hypothetical person "has" faith, but merely a man that SAYS he has faith.* It distinguishes the one who "**possesses**" from the one who merely "**professes.**"

Secondly, conclusions are based on the question, can faith save him? The AV unfortunately gives a wrong impression, for he is not asking about faith in general, *but that type of faith which one has who makes claims without producing fruit.* This is affirmed by the presence of the definite article in Greek meaning "the faith." "Can faith save him?" would be a proper translation. Which faith? That which the man claims to have.

**So, is it possible for that faith to exist without the support of works?** The answer is no. Jesus himself said that works would be required for those that have a living faith. If faith is without works then it is dead faith.

If a person professes that he is a new person in Christ, then he must live a new life dictated by doing works for Christ. James' theme of being 'swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath' (1:19), being a do-er of the Word by looking after the poor of the world and bridling his tongue (1:21 – 27), and not showing favoritism (2:8) is all tied up in the aspect of the law of faith-works. If a man truly has faith, he will show true works.

2:15. If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 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? – James, as the ever resourceful teacher now brings his teaching into a point of a practical daily experience. James has given an example of 'action-less Christianity.' There is no joy in his serving and his faith is dead.

2:17. Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. – True saving faith is something that will motivate a life into action. If faith is only talked about then it is a weak faith, however, if faith is talked about and acted upon it will be a motivator toward thinking of others and serving them. Faith without action is useless and dead.

2:18. But someone will say, "I have faith, and you have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. – The objector that James is writing about is trying to cut the law of faith-works into two. In essence he is arguing that one person may be good at having faith, while James himself is good at deeds and works. James' point is that

the two cannot be separated. A profession of faith is no good without the action of works. They are both crucial to salvation. James' next verse shows the importance of the crucial combination in the picture of salvation.

## II. Demonic Faith

2:19. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble! –

In an age of polytheistic belief (that is a belief of many gods), the Jews and the Christian were different from most by having a monotheistic belief (the belief of one God). James is now saying that the belief by itself, though excellent, is not enough. Even the demons believe – and tremble! – James recognizes, as did Christ, that demons exist. (Matt 17:18). There is no question as to them being mythical beings or imagined creatures. Demons are real, and from this verse we learn that they are intelligent beings and also have a belief system.

James teaches that demons have faith. Is this the faith of salvation? No. It is the faith of belief. The word for 'believe' that is used here is *pisteuo*. This same word is used to describe the believer's belief in Jesus. The lesson is that both Christians and demons profess a belief in Christ. However, it is what we do with that belief that will determine our salvation.

Many people today believe that they are Christians because they say they have a belief of God. However, the belief is not backed up by a lifestyle, speech or actions. Likewise, the demons have a belief of God, but they do not do the works of God and consequently they are not 'saved.' Their faith is a dead faith, much like the people who have a belief of God but do nothing about it.

Born again Christians believe that there is a God, who saves through Christ. That is the faith that they have. They then take this faith and live it out in their lifestyle. This is a saving faith – a faith that is alive with good works bringing about a right relationship with God

## III. Dynamic Faith

2:20. But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

2:22. Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? – James now gives two examples of faith combining with works. This is his teaching on dynamic faith. He keeps in mind his audience of both Jews and Gentiles and gives one example of the Jewish race, and one with a non-Jewish background.

### Abraham

Abraham is the father of all who believe. Abraham had to have faith before he could be justified by his