

James 2:14-17

Faith and Works, Episode 1

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James 2:14-17 (NASB)

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and be filled, and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

Running start

- Major theme 1: Consistency
 - 1:6 – asking without doubt (wavering)
 - 1:8 – warning against being double-minded (inconsistent)
 - 1:26 – bridling the tongue
 - 2:1 – warning against partiality
- Major theme 2: Words and actions
 - 1:22 – hearer and doers
 - 2:12 – speak and act according to the “law of liberty”
- Precursors of (Pauline) Grace
 - 1:2 – joy in trials
 - 1:9 – glory in humility
 - 1:12 – new standard for blessing
 - 1:25 & 2:12 – law of liberty
 - 2:13 – mercy glories over judgment

Advantage none

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

Greek (ophelos – use)

Increase, profit, meaning furtherance, advantage

- *My brethren* – James is speaking to fellow believers, but not necessarily speaking about them
- *Someone* – generic term; could be any person
 - What is in question is the validity of this person's claims
- Is this “spiritual” profit, or “earthly” profit?
 - The last part of the verse indicates this is primarily about the ultimate spiritual profit

Words, words, words!

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

Greek (pistis – faith)

a firm and confiding belief in Jesus and His gospel

- True faith is belief in the gospel, i.e. saving faith
 - Saying you have faith is equivalent to saying you are “in Christ”
- Wuest: *if a person is saying, I am in possession of faith*
- Hiebert: *“Say” (lege) is in the present tense, indicating that this individual repeatedly advances his claim that he has faith.*
- The faith in this verse is merely claimed faith
 - McCalley calls it “lip faith”

One way

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

Greek (sōzō – save)

rescue from spiritual death; to deliver from the penalties of the Messianic judgment

- John 14:16 – Christ is the only way; He is the only salvation
- The question here is not whether or not faith saves; the question is whether or not we have the faith that saves
- The “new life”, obtained by faith, will result in changed actions
 - Romans 6

Let me sum up

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

- Romans 6:2 *How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*
- James is saying here, *How can we who believe not show any change in our life?*
- The question shouldn't be, "Do I have this saving faith?"
- The question should be, "Now that I have this saving faith, how will my actions be different?"

Words without actions

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

- Here we have an object lesson
- If someone is in need, is it good enough to merely say that we want to help them?
- The contrast here is between true generosity, and claimed generosity

Show me the money

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

- *ergon* (works) – 1:4,25; 2:17,18,20,21,22,24,25,26; 3:13
 - In particular, see vs. 1:25 – *effectual doer*
 - Plural indicates it is not one specific deed
 - This is a lifestyle – *continually producing works*
- Paul expounds frequently on this topic
 - Colossians 1:9-12; Ephesians 2:8-10
- *nekros* (dead) – can mean literally dead, or spiritually dead
 - Context indicates spiritually powerless
- *Faith* – refers back to verse 14
 - Lip faith, not true faith

What does it all mean?

- James assumes position (he doesn't explicate it like Paul)
- James focuses intently on the conditional aspects of our position
- These verse are essentially an argument by contradiction
 - He is showing the absurdity of claiming faith/salvation when there is not a changed life.
 - Ironside: *There is no work of grace in the heart where there are no acts of grace in the life.*
- James does not explain how we are to live this new life (that's Paul's job)
- Our response, "Since I have *true* faith, how do I then continually produce these good works."