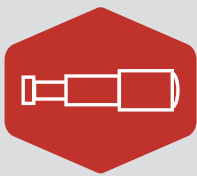




Lesson 7: Back Your Faith with Action

Main Idea: The contemporary church seems to be in a quest for believers. Jesus was on a quest, not simply for believers, but also for discipleship. He was on a quest for disciples. There is a difference between giving mental assent, which is called salvation, and truly being converted—being changed as you follow Jesus Christ. This lesson explores the bold expression of James' theology of faith and works.

Scripture: James 2:14-26



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

James mainly writes to Jewish Christians. The Jews hold to a doctrine of oneness or unity of God.¹ They use Deuteronomy 6:4 to formulate their doctrine. The unity of God is important, but right doctrine does not save. Belief that affects the head but not the heart, hands, and feet falls short of saving faith. Biblical faith will affect your actions. Faith is not a substitute for works, but a source of works. Faith is the root and works are the fruit. What James is saying in this passage of Scripture is that real faith really works.

Faith and works are like the composition of salt. Sodium is an extremely active element found naturally only in combined form. That is, it must be merged with something else. Chlorine, on the other hand, is a poisonous gas that gives household bleach its offensive odor. But when sodium and chlorine are combined, the result is sodium chloride, common table salt. Faith and works

¹ Nicoll, W. Robertson, *The Expositor's Greek NT, Vol IV.* (Grand Rapids, MI. William B. Eardmans Publishing Co, 1897), 440.

are like sodium and chlorine. Faith without deeds is inactive. Faith without deeds is irresponsible. Faith without deeds is present in church but not in the everyday world. It is pietistic: It sings songs and raises hands but is divorced from ethics and morality. It does not serve the Lord in the real world. Faith without works lacks commitment to discipleship.

On the flip side, works without faith is equally dangerous, because works without faith produce duty rather than joy. They bring legalism and bondage. Faith without works is like trying to drive a car without any gasoline.

James utilizes a couple of rhetorical questions to drive home the point that a person who confesses faith but does not manifest righteous works does not have saving faith. James' idea of "works" is different from Paul's when he rebukes those who depend on "works" for salvation. James is concerned about the person who gives mere lip service to faith but does not live righteously. Such a person offers no advantage to the kingdom of God. James emphasizes that "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Three times in verses 17, 20, and 26, he tells the reader his position, and then he illustrates it with three examples.

James 2:22 mentions that in the case of Abraham, faith and actions were working together synergistically. Synergistic is a term which means that when two parts are put together, their power together is greater than their power individually as separate parts. Take sodium and chloride, for example. When you put them together, there is synergism, and their new power together is mightier than each in isolation. Faith and works are also synergistic. Their power together is greater than either one alone.



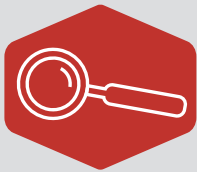
My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through completing the reading assignments below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you.

Counterfeit money looks like real money to many people. However, there is no value in counterfeit money. Likewise, many people claim to be believers in Jesus but lack evidence to support their claim. What value is a faith that does not reveal itself in a life that pleases God? The Scripture passage in this lesson points to two questions that establish the principle that faith and works go together. The questions are, "What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?" and, "Can such faith save him?" The answer to both questions is negative. James is saying that works (deeds) must complement and

illustrate faith. After establishing this principle in verse 14, he illustrates how faith and works belong together:

- Faith helps people in need (2:14-16).
- True faith always manifests itself in obedience to God and compassionate deeds done for needy people (2:17).
- True faith requires more than belief. Even demons believe (2:18-19).
- True faith will be tested (2:20-24).
- True faith is not just for the big heroes of the Bible but for everyday people too (2:25-26).



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Application:

- Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:
 - » Who appears in this passage?

 - » Where is this passage taking place?

 - » When is this passage occurring?

 - » Why is this passage important?

 - » What is happening in this passage?

- » How does this passage apply to my life?

- Circle and write down any reoccurring words in this passage.

- Read James 2:14-17. What value does James place on faith without deeds?

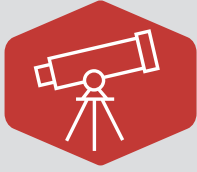
- Read James 2:20-25 and answer the following:
 - » What actions showed that Abraham had biblical faith?

 - » What action showed that Rahab had biblical faith?

 - » What can you glean from these two individuals?

- What have you learned about the importance of backing your faith with practical action in your life?

- What are some practical things you can do for those in your sphere of influence to show them you are a Christian?



Upward and Outward Focus (Telescope)

How does the Scripture affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers in your journal.

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about the text you just studied. How did these verses help deepen your love for God?

- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate this love to others?



Using My FireBible

Read the study notes for the following verses in the Fire-Bible and answer the accompanying questions.

- James 2:14. Why is practical evidence of sincere Christian devotion so vital for a believer?

- James 2:17. What does James teach is needed for true faith?



- James 2:21. Why did James use Abraham as an example of faith?

- James 2:22. Why are faith and actions placed together?

- James 2:24. What is the contrast between James' and Paul's use of the word "works"?

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)
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