

Difficult Passages in the NT
Faith Without Works Is Dead (James 2:14-26)

November 15, 2020

James 2:14 ¶ **What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?**

James 2:15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

James 2:16 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?

James 2:17 **Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.**

James 2:18 ¶ But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works [Note: many more manuscripts read *by your works*], and I will show you my faith by my works [= I will show you by my works, my faith.]”

James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.[”]

James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, **that faith without works is useless?**

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

James 2:22 You see that **faith was working with [= collaborating/assisting] his works**, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

James 2:23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God.

James 2:24 You see that a man is **justified by works** and not by faith alone [= only].

James 2:25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also **justified by works** when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

James 2:26 **For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.**

Some important questions:

1. What does it mean to be “saved” in James 2?
2. What is a “faith without works” in James 2?
3. Why does a “faith without works” not “save” in James 2?
4. When James claims “faith without works is dead” in James 2, what does “dead” mean?
5. What does it mean to be “justified by works” and how does this relate to being “justified by faith”?
6. What is the argument of the imaginary objector, the “foolish fellow”?

In James, to be “saved” does not mean _____.

1. What does it mean to be “saved” in James 2?

James 1:12 ¶ Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

James 1:15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

James 1:19 ¶ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

James 1:20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

James 1:21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, **in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls [= lives].**

What are the two ways Christians can respond to temptation? What are the results of those two ways?

We see this “salvation” at both the beginning and end of this book:

James 5:13 ¶ Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

James 5:14 Is anyone among you **sick**? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

James 5:15 **and the prayer offered in faith will restore [= save] the one who is sick**, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be **forgiven** him.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be **healed**. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

James 5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

James 5:18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

James 5:19 ¶ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back,

James 5:20 let him know that **he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul [= life] from death** and will cover a multitude of sins.

In James, you can “save” _____ through obedience to God’s Word.

In James, Christians can “save” _____.

What does it mean to be “saved” in James? How can Christians help other Christians be “saved” in James?

To be “saved” in James is _____.

God’s Salvation for Believers:

- Justification - saved from the _____ of sin**
- Sanctification - saved from the _____ of sin**
- Glorification - saved from the _____ of sin**

What is the type of salvation we should expect to find in James 2?

2. What is a “faith without works” in James 2?

What example of “faith without works” does James explain at the start of this section?

Have you experienced this in a church? How could this happen today?

“Faith without works” is the practical problem that James is trying to address with real Christians in real local churches. Any interpretation of this passage that detracts from this practical, sinful and _____ reality that all Christians are capable of doing is a wrong interpretation.

3. Why does a “faith without works” not “save” in James 2?

Why is James adamant that “faith without works” does not “save” (see 2:14 and 2:16)?

What is the parallel word to “save” that James uses in 2:14 and 2:16?

4. When James claims “faith without works is dead” in James 2, what does “dead” mean?

The word “dead” can be used in many different senses in normal language. When James says that “faith without works is dead,” this does not mean that a believer who has no works is spiritually dead and going to hell!

What are some ways that you use the word “dead” and do not mean “spiritually dead and going to hell”?

What is the illustration James uses in verse 26 to explain the meaning of “faith without works is dead”? Why is this such a fitting illustration?

5. What does it mean to be “justified by works” and how does this relate to being “justified by faith”?

Justification by faith is one of the greatest truths of Christianity. The New Testament repeats many times that the only way that a person is “righteous” or “not guilty” in a legal sense before a perfect God is by faith in Jesus as one’s Savior. On the basis of faith and for our faith in Jesus, God declares us “justified by faith.” This truth is revealed clearly in Genesis 15 when Abraham believed in God’s promise of a future Messiah from his lineage.

Gen. 15:6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

But James also points out that Abraham was recognized as God’s friend in 2:23. Abraham to this day is well-known in the world as a hero of faith and has the reputation as “the friend of God.”

Is. 41:8 “But you, Israel, My servant,
 Jacob whom I have chosen,
 Descendant of Abraham My friend,

2Chr. 20:7 “Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?

So, James is pointing out that there is a righteousness by faith, but there is also a righteousness by works. There is a standing before God, and there is a practical righteousness in life that has a profound effect on your life and the people around you.

What does James say can happen to a believer’s faith and works over time? What can happen to a believer’s faith if one has a “faith without works”?

Who else does James say is an illustration of being “justified by works” and not only “justified by faith?” What did this woman do for herself and her family (see Joshua 2ff)? Why is this such a perfect illustration of “salvation” in James 2?

Josh. 6:22 ¶ Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the harlot’s house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her.”

Josh. 6:23 So the young men who were spies went in and **brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives and placed them outside the camp of Israel.**

Josh. 6:24 They burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold, and articles of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

Josh. 6:25 However, Rahab the harlot and her father’s household and all she had, Joshua spared; and **she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.**

6. What is the argument of the imaginary objector, the “foolish fellow”?

James 2:17 **Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.**

James 2:18 ¶ But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works [Note: many more manuscripts read *by your works*], and I will show you my faith by my works [= I will show you by my works, my faith.]”

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James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, **that faith without works is useless?**

James uses an imaginary argument, and it’s clear that the objector must be saying, “It’s fine to have faith and no works. Faith and works do not ‘assist’ each other.”

What might this “foolish fellow” sound like today in a church?

The “foolish fellow” is making a sarcastic, bad argument. He says something like:

“Let’s say you have faith and I have works. You can no better show me what you believe from your works than I can show you from my works, my faith. There is no close connection between faith and works. Here’s the proof. You believe in one God, and you do good because of it. Demons also believe there is one God. They believe the same thing. But all they is tremble and keep on being demons. *Faith and works are not closely connected, and I’m good with my faith without works.*”