

*Faith was perfected* – Abraham’s faith in the midst of trial was perfected, strengthened and matured, by his works. Note confidence of Abraham’s faith in Hebrews 11:17-19.

### Verse 23

*The Scripture was fulfilled* – When Abraham put his faith to work, the implications of his original faith were realized and Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled.

*He was called the friend of God* – When believers are justified by works they achieve an intimacy with God that is manifest to others. Abraham is recognized as the friend of God by three religions; Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 15:14, “*You are my friends, if you do what I command you.*”

### Verse 24

*You see* – Plural. Now James returns to the readers of his epistle. *A man is justified by works, and not by faith alone* – There are two kinds of justifications! The word *alone* is an adverb and modifies the verb *justified*. The translation should read, “*You see then that a man is justified by works, and not only (justified) by faith.*”

By faith justification = Before God.

By works justification = Before men.

### Verse 25 The Illustration of Rahab

In contrast to Abraham, the patriarch of Israel, James uses Rahab the prostitute to demonstrate justification by works. Note carefully Hebrews 11:31, Joshua 2. Rahab was justified before God when she believed. She was not justified by her works until she received the spies and helped them escape to safety. As a result she and her family were saved (delivered) when Israel defeated Jericho (Joshua 6:25). Rahab became the great, great grandmother of David.

### Verse 26

*Faith without works is dead* – In the same way that the human spirit keeps the body alive, works are the vitalizing “spirit” which keeps one’s faith alive. When a believer ceases to act on his faith that faith becomes a creedal corpse.

## James – 2:14-26 Justification by Works

This section of James may be the most misunderstood passage in the Bible. Because of the *supposed* tension (disagreement) between Paul’s statements in Romans 4 concerning justification by faith alone and James’ statements about justification by faith and works, numerous interpretations have arisen.

Those who understand justification in this passage as referring to eternal justification (going to heaven):

- 1) Faith and works are necessary for eternal life.
- 2) The right kind of faith (faith that produces works) is necessary for eternal life.
  - A) The Arminian – If you do not continue in good works then you risk losing your salvation.
  - B) The Calvinist – If you do not persevere in good works then you did not have the right kind of faith. In other words, you are not truly saved.

Those who understand justification in this passage as referring to temporal justification (justification before men):

- 1) Faith and works are necessary for *the believer* to be justified before men and at the judgment seat.
- 2) There is only one kind of faith.

Several key issues emerge from the views above:

- 1) What is the nature of faith?
- 2) What does the word “saved” mean?
- 3) Is there one or two ‘justifications’ in view?
- 4) What is the objector saying and where does his quote end?

As we go verse by verse through this passage we will address these issues.

### Verse 14

*My brethren, if a man says* – If we are honest with the context of James, then clearly believers are being addressed.

*Can (that) faith save him?* – The word *that* is an interpretive addition. The *KJV* and *NKJV* simply state, “Can faith save him?” The *NIV* states, “Can *such* faith save him?” The

NASV states, “Can *that* faith save him?” The issue here is the nature of faith. Those who hold to Lordship salvation argue that there are two kinds of faith in the New Testament: *saving faith* and *non-saving faith*. Yet careful analysis of the word faith (*pistos, pisteuo*) does not support this idea. Dave Anderson states:

“The notion that in the New Testament believing in Jesus as Savior is not saving faith is simply wrong. The New Testament knows of no sub-level or insufficient faith in Christ as Savior that does not save.” (The Nature of Faith, Chafer Theological Seminary Journal, 1999)

Why two kinds of faith? This has been added to fit the Reformed and Lordship understanding of this passage.

The clear answer to James’ question is that faith cannot *save* the man who has no works! This brings up the issue of what is meant by the word *save*? James uses the word *save* (*sozo*) five times in his epistle (1:21, 2:14, 4:12, 5:15, 5:20). In context every use refers to temporal deliverance and not salvation from hell. James has just stated in 2:12-13 that we will be judged by the law of liberty at the judgment seat of Christ. Faith that has no works cannot *save* a person at that judgment.

### Verses 15-16 – An Illustration

The poor brother or sister – If you do not put actions with your faith it is useless for the one in need. A benediction cannot save a starving man from death; only bread can do that.

### Verse 17

James has no thought of whether or not this person is a believer and possesses eternal. His wish is to admonish Christians to practice their faith by doing good works. The choice of the word “dead” is perfectly suited to the context. Just as idle words cannot save a brother from death in the absence of life’s necessities, a dead (not working) faith cannot save us from the death-dealing consequences of sin. Therefore faith not expressed is by itself, or ineffective. (See Zane Hodges, The Epistle of James, pp 62-63)

### Verses 18-19 The Objector

This literary method of using the mouth of an imaginary objector is used often in Scripture (Romans 9:19-20, 1 Corinthians 15:35-36). It is called a diatribe. The question is where does the objector start and where does he end his statements. The NIV and the NKJV translate only the first half of the verse in quotation marks. The NASV translates all of verse 18 in quotation marks. In the context of the argument it seems best to take all of verse 18 and 19 as the words of the objector. Using the Greek word order the objector’s statement would be:

*“You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith from your works, and I will show you, from my works, my faith. You believe that there is one God; you do well. The demons also believe, and tremble.”*

The objector’s argument is that there is not a close relation between faith and works. His illustration is that even demons believe but it does not produce the same result as a man’s faith. In other words the objector is saying, “Don’t criticize my faith because I don’t do such and such a thing.”

### Verse 20

*You foolish fellow* – This begins James’ reply to the objector’s argument. James is saying that the argument is senseless and that the objector is foolish to make it.

*Faith without works is dead (useless)* – James is not saying that without works as a proof, faith never existed. He is saying that it is dead in the sense of being useless.

### Verses 21-22 The Illustration of Abraham

*Justified by works when he offered up Isaac* – Abraham offered up Isaac in Genesis 22. Abraham is declared righteous in Genesis 15:6. There are at least 25 to 30 years between these two events. When God declares a believer righteous they never lose their righteous standing before Him. Abraham’s subsequent justification refers to a second declaration of his righteousness but this time his works declared him righteous.

*You see* – This is singular indicating that Abraham is still responding to the objector of verses 18-19.