

How does James 2:14-16 affect our Assurance of Eternal Life?

I. Does James Contradict Paul?

- A. Paul very clearly states that a person is justified by faith alone (Rom. 3:20, 24, 28; 4:2, 5; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; 5:4) (and O.T.-Hab. 2:4)

II. Possible Solutions:

- A. Is one of these inspired Biblical authors simply wrong?
- B. Are both faith and works necessary for eternal life but neither Paul nor James mentioned both of them? They simply mentioned one of them but required us to put them together.
- C. Can a justified person lose his salvation when his life does not produce works? Are works necessary to maintain eternal life? (Arminianism)
- D. Maybe a person is justified by faith alone but the fact that there are no works proves the person never was justified in the first place. Are works necessary to be assured of eternal life? (Perseverance or Lordship Salvation view)
- E. Are there two kinds of faith, one that saves and one that does not save?
- F. Or is there another solution???

III. But how should we interpret James 2:14-26?

- A. Believers are assured of their eternal life only by trusting the promises in God's Word. (John 3:16; 5:24; 1 John 5:11-13)
- B. Is it possible we are misunderstanding what James said?
- C. What is the context of the whole book of James?
- D. Does James ever agree with John and Paul on this subject? (James 1:16-18)

IV. What does the Bible mean by the word "faith"?

- A. Everywhere in the simple, direct statements of the Bible about salvation, faith is nothing more than a response to a divine initiative. It is the means by which eternal life is received.
- B. Faith is simply believing that Christ's substitutionary death on the cross paid the penalty for all my sin.

V. So what is James writing about in chapter 2:14-26?

- A. What does James mean by "save"?

1. The verb “save” can mean different things.
 - a. We just always ask, “rescued from what?”
 - b. We will find the answer in the context.
2. The word “save” sometimes means “rescued from physical death” elsewhere in scripture. (Mark 3:4; Psalms)
3. How does James use the word “save” elsewhere in this book? (James 1:21-22; 5:19-20)
 - a. James reflects the theme of sin bringing on death. (James 1:14-15)
 - 1) “Death” generally means “separation”.
 - 2) Examples in scripture of where “death” means physical death. (Acts 5:1-11 (Ananias and Sapphira disciplined with physical death); Prov. 11:19; 13:14; 19:16; 1 John 5:16-17; James 5:19-20)
 - b. Material in James is like material in Proverbs.
 - c. Now James is sounding like Paul. (Rom. 8:13)
 - d. Could it be that James 2 is talking about physical life and death as well?
 - e. It would also be consistent with the fact that James addressed his book to “believers”: (James 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14, etc.)
- B. Can James 2:14-26 be naturally interpreted to mean “saved from the discipline of an early physical death”?
 1. Can this passage naturally be interpreted according to this greater context?
 2. The Opening Assertion (v. 14)
 3. The First Illustration (vv. 15-17) (about physical death)
 4. A Detractor and the Answer (v. 18)
 - a. The emphasis is “show you”. James is interested here in whether other people see the outworking of your faith in your life.
 5. Faith does not, of necessity, change one’s life (v. 19)
 - a. Demons know there is one God but they rebel against Him.
 - b. This does not teach a kind of faith that does not result in eternal life.
 6. The Illustration of Abraham (vv. 20-24)

a. James uses two kinds of justification in this illustration:

- 1) **Lexical meanings of word Justify** Strong, J. (1996). Enhanced Strong's Lexicon. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.
 - a) **1** to render righteous or such he ought to be.
 - b) **2** to show, exhibit, evince, one to be righteous, such as he is and wishes himself to be considered.
 - c) **3** to declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be.
- 2) Abraham was justified before God by faith alone.
- 3) Abraham was justified before men by demonstrating his faith in God by obeying God.
 - a) This passage deals with the second type of justification

7. The illustration of Rahab involves physical life and death (v. 25)

8. Illustration of a Dead Body (26)

VI. Summary Meaning of the passage

- A. James wants his readers to live in such a way that everyone around them will know they are believers
 1. He never mentions eternal life, heaven or hell because that is not what he is talking about.
 2. It's not even in the context

VII. Our Interpretational Problem

- A. We have created this big problem because we, without any reason to do so, insert the issue of eternal life in the middle of a book about the practical life of the believer.
- B. We have made "saved" a technical term for being rescued from eternal death.
 1. Illustration of kleenex, coke
- C. Not only have we created a huge theological problem, but we have also missed the very point that James was trying to make.
- D. We must be very careful:
 1. Do not make a passage address eternal life when there is no reason to do so.

2. Do not make a general term used in the Bible take on one specific meaning everywhere.
3. Do not take verses out of context.

VIII. Application of James' Message

- A. If you are tempted to question whether you have enough faith to get you to heaven, remember the Bible makes the object of your faith (Jesus Christ) the issue, rather than the amount of your faith.
- B. If you are tempted to question whether you have the right kind of faith to get you to heaven, remember the Bible makes the object of your faith (Jesus Christ) the issue, not the kind of faith.
- C. If you are tempted to question whether you have enough good works to prove that you have faith to get you to heaven, remember James is not making accompanying works a condition of a faith that is able to give you eternal salvation.
- D. If you are tempted to question whether you can have true assurance of your eternal salvation, remember that Paul, John and James all want you to have complete assurance of your eternal salvation.
 1. 1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.
- E. James 2 is not dealing with eternal salvation and does not question our assurance of eternal salvation.
- F. Believers, make sure your faith shows to other people. This will prove to them that you are a believer. It will also serve to lengthen lives, both your own life as well as the lives of others.
- G. If your life does not give evidence to your faith then your faith is dead in that it is not accomplishing the good in the lives of others it is intended to accomplish.