



TEACH ME
THE BIBLE PODCAST

STUDY GUIDE

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CHAPTER

2:14-26

THE BOOK OF

JAMES

Faith, Works and Blessing



James 2:14-26

If you are new to the Story of the Bible or would like to review the Story:
Listen to the following TMTB Podcasts:

The Story: Understanding the “Big Story” (30 min)

Old Testament: Walk Through the Broad Story (27 min)

Timeline: New Testament Beginnings (35 min)

Letters: Paul’s Writing to the Churches–Part 1 (30 min)

REVIEW

In 2:14-26, James is continuing to validate his point that the one holding a theology of personal favoritism (i.e., partiality) is a violator of the Law rather than a doer of it. In other words, James just established that as a violator of the Law such a one has no “works” of the Law in which to appeal for the source of their “blessing.” Instead, they should appeal rather to the mercy that has been given to them by the Lord and should therefore treat others with that same mercy.

Remember back in James 1, James had established that trials “work” to refine one’s faith and are thus necessary. In other words, faith plus trials works (or produces) endurance and the work (or result) of endurance of one’s faith in the midst of trials is a perfected faith. Moreover, as James explained, a perfected faith is the blessing. Thus, James will say in chapter 5, “*we count those as blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.*”

Therefore, both faith (the beginning of one’s relation with the Lord) and having that faith tested so that it will work (i.e., build endurance) is necessary for one’s faith to be perfected. The antagonist, however, is not appealing to the “works” of endurance for perfecting their faith (which James calls a blessing). Instead, the antagonist appeals to works of the Law (which James has just demonstrated that they do not do) that they believe are producing financial reward (i.e., a wrong understanding of “blessing”). Thus, James poses the logical question, “*What use is it, my brethren, if a man has faith (which they do) but has no works (i.e., works of the law which they do not)? Can that faith save him?*” The way that the question is structured in Greek expects a negative answer. In other words, if one believes that faith plus works of the Law justifies (like the antagonist apparently believes), yet that one has no works of the Law (which James has demonstrated that they do not since they act with partiality), then would that one be justified according to their own reasoning? The answer is no. James’s point here is the same one that Paul is making in his letter to the Galatians: **if works of the Law cannot give eternal life before faith, then how do they accomplish it after faith?** The answer is that they cannot.



James 2:14-26

MONDAY

Listen to the James 2:14-26 podcast.

TUESDAY

In 2:14-26, the exchange between James and the hypothetical objector (i.e., “*but someone may say...*”) is recorded in verses 18-19. The antagonist’s argument is that faith is not enough and that works (i.e., works of the Law) are necessary for righteousness. James’s response (vv. 20-26) is that a perfected faith moves one to righteous acts. Thus, faith must be perfected which comes through testing.

WEDNESDAY

Where do the quotation marks go? James 2:18 contain quotations. In Greek there are no “quotation marks.” Instead, other literary markers are utilized to denote a change in speaker.

The NASB reads as follows: But someone may well say, “*You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*” The quotation marks end at the end of the sentence.

However, the NIV, RSV, and ESV all read as follows: But someone may well say, “*You have faith and I have works.*”

Admittedly, James 2:14-18 is a difficult passage. However, we ought not change the rules of Greek grammar to make the verse fit out theology. Instead, we must play fair with the text. If the norms of Greek grammar are followed then there is no warrant for ending the quotation marks before the end of verse 19.

Thus, the text of 2:18-20 would read as follows: But someone may well say, “*You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*” But are you willing to recognize you foolish fellow... In other words, the antagonist is arguing that faith is not enough. Instead, faith plus works of the Law are required for righteousness.



James 2:14-26

Read Acts 15:1-35. **What are the Pharisees teaching in 15:5? Does Paul agree with this theology? Does Peter agree with this theology? Does James agree with theology?**

On this point Paul, Peter, and James agree (and are in disagreement with the Pharisees). Now read Titus 3:5-8. **Is Paul saying the same thing as James?**

THURSDAY

As is fairly well known, the Book of James has been accused of being in direct contradiction with the Apostle Paul's writings. At the core of the issue is how one is "*righteous*" or "*justified*." The root word appears as a noun in James 1:20; 2:23; 3:18 and as a verb in 2:21, 24, 25.

Read Romans 2 and see if Paul doesn't sound like James. The Law is good if it is used lawfully.

Read 1 Timothy 1:6-11. In fact, the Law is perfect.

Read Psalm 19. However, the Law cannot make one righteous.

Read Galatians 3:21-22. Only faith can do that. James's point is the same point that Paul is making in Romans 5. Namely, one's faith is perfected because it endures through trials.

FRIDAY

According to James, faith without works is dead (2:17). It is worthless/idle (2:20). For, just as the body without spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead (2:26). The relationship between 2:17 and 2:20 is an important one. A dead faith is a useless, worthless, idle one. It is a faith that is not working. James's warning is that when one returns to law-keeping for righteousness, then one's faith is not being relied upon.

Read Galatians 1-3. **Is Paul really saying something different than James?** Or, is he making the same point: if one returns to law-keeping for righteousness after belief then that one's faith is idle, worthless, dead (since it is only faith that can make one righteous).