

The Relationship Between Faith and Works

A Comparison of James 2:24 and Ephesians 2:8-10

Part II

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To My Father
In Loving Memory

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Who Dedicated His Life To Loving His Family
“Family Comes First”

I Miss You!

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“So let our lips and lives express The holy Gospel we profess; So let our works and virtues shine, To prove the doctrine all divine.”

- Isaac Watts-

General Background

Historical/Cultural

The Epistle refers to its audience as “the twelve tribes scattered among the nation” (James 1:1). James addressed Jewish believers of the Diaspora—Jews living outside of Palestine, although Gentiles have been associated with the dispersion in the New Testament.¹ This address describes an audience that is most certainly Jewish.²

The language used supports this claim. The use of the terms “law” and “synagogue” and “Old Testament and Jewish metaphors”³ as well as the use of the Jewish *Shema*⁴ or confession of “one God,” represents Jewish doctrine. Also, the New Testament describes James as a minister to the Jews.⁵

¹ 1 Pet 1:1.

² D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction To The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 414-5; C. Ryan Jenkins, “Faith and Works in Paul and James,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 71; Douglas J. Moo, 30; James B. Adamson, 51.

³ Carson, Moo, and Morris, 415.

⁴ The Jewish *Shema* came from Deut 6:4.

⁵ Gal 2:9.

It seems that this Epistle was composed prior to the Council of Jerusalem,⁶ which occurred in A.D. 48 or 49. This date seems likely because James makes no connection with or reference to the Council when addressing relevant issues⁷ discussed during the Council. If the date is correct, *James* would have been written no later than the mid 40's⁸ making *James* the first New Testament book written.⁹

James was written for those who did not understand the relationship between "faith" and "works."¹⁰ James had concern for those who professed faith in Christ but lived lives that did not "justify" their profession.¹¹ His audience was antinomian, living as if obedience to the Law were not necessary nor of any value. They understood that salvation by "faith" meant the Law was "done away with." They misunderstood that by faith in Christ's death, the penalty of Law was removed, not its guide for living. Jenkins describing the church writes:

Therefore James' remarks are best understood in light of the historical situation he was addressing, namely, a pervasive antinomianism that took undue advantage of the law of liberty in the Gospel. In response to this, James sought to demonstrate that true religion before God (1:27) involves a validation of one's profession of faith by a demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit (2:14-26).¹²

In view of the Gospel's annihilation of the Law¹³ and the Jewish struggle between libertine excess and legalism, it is proper to interpret *James* as "the fine line" between antinomianism and legalism. James' teaching is that true faith will be demonstrated through its display of works.¹⁴

General Context of James 2:14-26

James discusses the necessity of the testing of faith.¹⁵ The faith that perseveres is "mature and complete, not lacking anything" (1:4). James in defining pure religion says, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (1:27). Moo, describing verses 14-26 writes, "This passage is the climax of James' plea

⁶ Acts 15; Carson, Moo, and Morris, 414.

⁷ works of righteousness and Gospel

⁸ Carson, Moo, and Morris, 414.

⁹ C. Ryan Jenkins, 71-2; R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith That Works* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 15.

¹⁰ "Faith" and "works" is also referred to as "Law and Gospel."

¹¹ C. Ryan Jenkins, 73.

¹² Ibid., 72.

¹³ Col 2:14-15.

¹⁴ See verses 2:18, 21, 24; C. Ryan Jenkins, 73.

¹⁵ Jas 1:3.

for a 'pure religion' that vindicates itself in action. It is a text that sustains a single theological argument throughout."¹⁶ The context of this entire passage is the nature of "pure and faultless" religion.

Verses 14-26 will be divided into three sections: verses 14-17, 18-19, and 20-26. The first section begins with a question about faith without works and ends with the summary—"faith by itself...is dead." The second section is a discussion with a diatribe or opponent.¹⁷ The third section demonstrates that faith without works is useless.

2:14-17

Discussing the nature of faith, James begins, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" This is a question James was likely to encounter repeatedly.¹⁸ This question reveals his thesis—faith without works is dead.¹⁹ The present subjunctive verbs in verse 14a²⁰ imply that the action is repetitive; meaning that James' opponent repeatedly speaks of his belief, but his faith is void of any acts of charity.²¹ James never states that his opponent possesses true faith; he only points out that his opponent claims to have faith.²² The Greek text uses the article with the word faith²³ in verses 14, 17, and 20 referring to the specific faith mentioned.²⁴

James is not teaching that faith does not save. He is teaching that this kind of faith²⁵ will not save. When James asks, "Can such faith save him?" the final judgment is in view. The Greek text demands the negative answer to the question.²⁶ This faith will not prove profitable on the Day of Judgment; it cannot save because it is useless. Lorenzen states, "Works are necessary for salvation."²⁷ James does not imply that works save rather than faith; he is expressing their union.

¹⁶ Douglas J. Moo, 99.

¹⁷ This "opponent" is either real or imaginary and is spoken in the singular to refute anyone who imagined they had faith while their life is void of works.

¹⁸ Robert H. Stein, "Saved by Faith [Alone]" in Paul Verses "Not saved by Faith Alone" in James," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4 (2000): 9.

¹⁹ James' thesis implies that true faith must be accompanied by works.

²⁰ *legê* "claim" and *echê* "have."

²¹ Nigel Turner, *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 114.

²² The word "claims" in the NIV is translated from *legê* meaning "says."

²³ *ê pistis*.

²⁴ Douglas J. Moo, 100.

²⁵ This "kind" of faith is a profession without works. This faith does not save.

²⁶ Thornwald Lorenzen, "Faith without Works does not count before God! James 2:14-26," *Expository Times* 89 (1978): 231.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

James' thesis²⁸ is illustrated in verses 15-16. He depicts a Christian brother or sister who is in need of some basic necessities²⁹ and a parishioner noticing says, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but offers no help. "Without clothing" most likely means inadequately dressed or lack of outer clothing; and "daily food" refers to food needed for the day.³⁰ The "someone"³¹ who claims to have faith is associated with the church because James refers to a "brother" or "sister" who is in need.³² The man's faith is a mock "faith" for it is void of love for others in Christ

His faith offers only empty words and does not attempt to help. The verbs "be warmed" and "be fed" are in the form of either the middle or passive tense. The response of the "Christian" is "keep yourself warm and well fed" or as a prayer, "may you be warm and well fed" respectively.³³ Whether in the middle or passive is of little relevance since the point is that the poor person walked away needy. James is not condemning well meaning words; he is condemning the lack of provision for the needs of others. James concludes, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James is exploiting the faith mentioned in 14. If someone claims to have faith and does not love others, the point is clear, "as long as the church fails to provide the needy with the 'necessary things,' nothing good has been done."³⁴ The church that is apathetic to the needs of others is a dead church, which is not a "church" at all.³⁵

James is contrasting "true faith" and "counterfeit faith." True faith is united with works of love and counterfeit faith is void of works. Counterfeit faith is really no faith at all, just as a corpse is not a man.³⁶ While counterfeit faith has form, "it lacks force—outwardly inoperative, because inwardly dead."³⁷

2:18-19

James switches from an indifferent faith to a practical faith by the use of a diatribe. James writes, "But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." In Dibelius' opinion, this is the hardest verse in the entire New Testament to interpret.³⁸ This passage is difficult because it is unclear who is speaking and how it is to be understood. Is the speaker

²⁸ James' thesis is faith without works is dead and that true faith necessarily will produce works.

²⁹ A brother or sister is in need of clothes and daily food.

³⁰ Robert H. Stein, 9.

³¹ *tis* in verses 14 and 16 translates "someone" or "anyone."

³² Douglas J. Moo, 102.

³³ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁴ Mark Proctor, "Faith, Works, and the Christian Religion in James 2:14-26," *Evangelical Quarterly* 69 (1997): 312.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 313.

³⁶ Jas 2:26.

³⁷ James B. Adamson, 124.

³⁸ Martin Dibelius, *James* (Hermeneia: Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 154.

James' friend or an opponent? Where does James' reply begin—18b, 19, or 20?³⁹
There are three arguments when trying to identify the speaker.

(1) The person is a supporter of James who heaps doubt on faith without works. The “you” is the false believer and the “I” is his or James' view. This ally of James argues against the possibility of the dichotomy between faith and works.⁴⁰ Faith or works independently are not acceptable alternatives to salvation. The “you” cannot demonstrate faith because he does not have works; but the “I” can and does demonstrate his faith by what he does.⁴¹ This interpretation has the pronouns consistent throughout the argument. The “you” is always the one with empty faith, while the “I” is the ally of James.⁴²

(2) It is an objector who doubts the faith of James. This interpretation will read verse 18 to say, “Do you, James, really have faith?” Then James responds with, “I have works; you cannot show me your faith since you have none, but I will show you mine by what I do.”⁴³

(3) It is an opponent of James who argues that faith and works can exist separately. Some Christians will have faith while others will have works. Barclay writes:

Faith is a fine thing; and works are fine things. They are both perfectly genuine manifestations of real religion. But the one man does not necessarily possess both. One man will have faith and another works. Well, then, you carry on with your work and I will carry on with my faith; and we are both being truly religious in our own way.⁴⁴

This objector claims that faith or works are each expressions of true religion. The New English Bible translates this verse in this light; it says, “But someone may object: ‘Here is one who claims to have faith and another who points to his deeds.’” The opponent would be objecting to the claim that people must have faith and works for salvation. James' opponents understood that we have different gifts, some have faith, and others have works. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 plainly says God gives spiritual gifts that include faith. The faith to which Paul is referring is a special “miracle working faith.”⁴⁵

³⁹ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁰ Robert H. Stein, 10.

⁴¹ Douglas, J. Moo, 104.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁴ William Barclay, 76-7.

⁴⁵ Joel C. Gregory, *James: Faith That Works!* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1986), 55; John Calvin, 402; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* Vol. 6 Acts to Revelations (Hendrickson, 1991), 458.

An argument against the first two interpretations will not be discussed due to the scope of the present work,⁴⁶ but the third will be the preferred.⁴⁷ This interpretation argues the separation between faith and works. The man possessing faith cannot condemn the one that possesses only works and vice versa.⁴⁸ James' reply in verse 18b argues against a false dichotomy of faith and works. He challenges his objector to produce real faith that has no expression in works, while James has no difficulty demonstrating his faith. Faith that is void of works is really no faith at all; and true faith is united with works, which are the evidence of true saving faith.

James discredits the dichotomy by addressing this faith as empty. He writes, "You believe that there is one God" (2:19), which describes this faith as an intellectual grasp of the *Shema* by his use of "believe that"⁴⁹ rather than the use of "believe in."⁵⁰ This *Shema* was extended into Christianity to distinguish it from polytheistic or syncretistic influence.⁵¹ James mocks his opponent's faith by saying, "good" because he grasps truth that was distinguished from the pagan world.⁵² This faith is a belief *about* God, an agreement of a theological statement,⁵³ rather than a living-trust *in* God. James never denies the intellectual dimension of faith, but alone is not enough. Confirmation of theological propositions is essential, but orthodoxy needs to be supplemented with orthopraxy for it to be practical.⁵⁴

Demons possess counterfeit faith and shudder⁵⁵ because they know the truth. Ironically, James' opponents have faith less than that of demons. The demons reaction to their belief⁵⁶ is a more appropriate than James' opponents.⁵⁷ An orthodox *Shema* void of works is less than the faith of demons. Faith must affect our attitudes and actions.⁵⁸
2:20-26

⁴⁶ For an argument against the first two interpretations, see Moo's Commentary *James* pages 104-6.

⁴⁷ Stein, Moo, Barclay, Dowd, Lorenzen, Reicke, Davids, Dibelius, and Tasker accept the third interpretation.

⁴⁸ Robert H. Stein, 11.

⁴⁹ *pisteueis oti* is translated "believe that."

⁵⁰ *pisteueis* plus the dative *en* or *eis* means "believe in." Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 125.

⁵¹ Thornwald Lorenzen, 232.

⁵² Sharyn Dowd, "Faith That Works: James 2:14-26," *Review and Expositor* 97 (2000): 198.

⁵³ Robert H. Stein, 11.

⁵⁴ Mark Proctor, 318-9.

⁵⁵ "shudder" is translated from *phrissousin* which means "shudder," "shiver," or "tremble" from fear.

⁵⁶ Demons possess greater knowledge than men due to their supernatural nature.

⁵⁷ Douglas J. Moo, 107.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

James boldly calls his opponent a “foolish man”⁵⁹ literally “you insane fellow.”⁶⁰ The term “foolish” is translated from a word⁶¹ that has overtones of intellectual and moral error.⁶² James asks his opponent, “...do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?” The word “useless”⁶³ literally means “not working” or “workless.” James is essentially asking, “Do you want evidence that faith without works is workless?” James illustrates his thesis by the examples of Abraham and Rahab.

James emphasizes why Abraham was considered righteous. James flatly says because of his works, “he offered up his son Isaac on the altar.” Stein points out that the question as to whether Abraham was justified by works expects a positive answer.⁶⁴ James explains that Abraham was righteous on the basis of his works in verse 22. He writes, “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” James’ use of the plural form of “works”⁶⁵ points to the fact that offering Isaac on the altar was one of many works that made him righteous.⁶⁶ James links faith and works by saying that they were working together. He points out that works “work with” faith and that his faith was made complete by what he did. Abraham’s faith was made mature or perfect by his works.

The example begun in verse 21 concludes in verse 23. It states that the “scripture was fulfilled,” demonstrating that Abraham supplemented “his belief in God’s promises with complementary deeds of kindness that perfected his walk with Yahweh and gave his statement in Genesis 15:6 its ultimate significance.”⁶⁷ Genesis 15:6 states, “Abram believed the Lord, and he [God] credited it to him as righteousness.” God found Abraham loyal, which resulted in His crediting of righteousness to him. Abraham’s loyalty was a reflection of his faith in God. Abraham’s faith moved him to obedience, which resulted in “righteousness” and why he was called a friend of God.⁶⁸

Verse 24 is controversial because of the statement “not by faith alone.” This apparent contradiction to Paul will be discussed later. While James states his thesis, he clearly addresses his specific audience. He uses different words when he addresses his

⁵⁹ *anthrôpe kene*.

⁶⁰ Max Zerwick S. J., and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* unab. 4th revised edition (Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico: Roma, 1993), 695.

⁶¹ *kenos* can be translated “senseless,” “foolish,” or “empty.”

⁶² Peter Davids, 126.

⁶³ James’ word choice in Greek creates a ‘play on words.’ The word for “work” is *ergôn* and “useless” comes from *argê*, which has the negative prefix ‘a’ in front of *ergôn*.

⁶⁴ Verse 21 says, *abraam o patêr êmôn ouk ex ergôn edikaiôthê anenegkas isaak ton uion autou epi to thusiastêrion*; The “ouk” in Greek expects the positive answer.

⁶⁵ *tois ergois*.

⁶⁶ Robert H. Stein, 14.

⁶⁷ Mark Proctor, 324-5.

⁶⁸ *philos theou eklêthê*.

opponent from his readers.⁶⁹ While the necessity of works is reaffirmed, he is not teaching justification by works. James is stressing that justification is not by faith *alone* but that salvation is by faith working together with works.⁷⁰ James concludes that faith along with works justify a man. Faith for his opponent was dead even though it was orthodox; it produced no love for his neighbor, only speech. Faith for James was an orthodox understanding producing good works.

James mentions only Rahab's works and makes no mention of her faith even though he could have.⁷¹ Beginning this verse, "In the same way..." we can interpret Rahab's example as Abraham's. The context of this entire passage is between faith and works. It would be proper to interpret Rahab's work as stemming from her faith.⁷² Moo comments that James wanted to emphasize that Rahab was a prostitute. While Abraham was seen as a great hero of the faith, their father,⁷³ Rahab was a woman of pagan living. Abraham and Rahab were righteous on the basis of their works that resulted from their faith.⁷⁴ They were justified by their works and not by faith alone. Given the context, it would be appropriate to at least mention the faith of Rahab, but James does not. Faith might not be mentioned because his opponent might try to use that against James. Also, James does not provide "proof" that Rahab was righteous as he did with Abraham.⁷⁵ James did not mention Rahab's faith or "proof" of her acceptance before God because they already knew this, due to Jewish tradition.⁷⁶

Verse 26 not only concludes the third section, it concludes the passage. James compares the relationship between body and spirit with faith and works. "The body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." In the same way the body is dead with the absence of the spirit, so faith is dead without works. James is comparing body with faith and spirit with works. The meaning is "that an unproductive and apathetic religion is as dead as a body that has no spirit."⁷⁷ "Dead orthodoxy has absolutely no power to save and may in fact hinder the person from coming to living faith, a faith enlivened by works of charity."⁷⁸ "Dead" faith produces no works, but "living" faith cannot be separated from works. Faith and works are not independent in the same way that a body cannot exist apart from the spirit.

Terms Defined: Faith and Works

⁶⁹ He uses *orate* (sec. person pl.) in this verse rather than *blepeis* (sec. person sing.) in verse 22 when he addressed his opponent.

⁷⁰ Jas 2:22.

⁷¹ James could have mentioned Rahab's faith...see Joshua 2:9-11 or Hebrews 11:31.

⁷² Robert H. Stein, 15.

⁷³ Jas 2:21.

⁷⁴ Douglas J. Moo, 116-7.

⁷⁵ Abraham was called a friend of God in verse 23.

⁷⁶ Martin Dibelius, 166-7.

⁷⁷ Mark Proctor, 329.

⁷⁸ Peter Davids, 134.

Faith

The word faith is found in this passage eleven times and the form “believe” is found three times. Faith, in this passage, has two meanings: the first is James’ opponent’s definition and second is James.⁷⁹ James hints that his opponents’ faith is not real in verse 14, “Can such faith save him?” The definite article used in the Greek along with faith⁸⁰ indicates that James has a particular kind of faith in mind. In verse 18, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds,’” which describes the faith of James’ opponent. It is used in this passage as an “intellectual acceptance of a theological assertion” as described in the *Shema*, that the demons also believe.⁸¹ This definition is how his audience would have understood it. Rakestraw, defining faith writes, “his speaking of ‘faith by itself’ (v. 17) and ‘faith alone’ (v. 24) reveal that his concept is one of mental agreement.”⁸² Davids says the same thing when he wrote, “the fact that James writes *you believe that* rather than ‘you believe in’ shows that he is thinking of intellectual belief rather than personal commitment.”⁸³ James’ audience had faith that was unproductive and unacceptable. He is condemning this faith even though it had an orthodox understanding of God, but since it is void of love, it is worthless.

James’ definition of real faith is deeper than his opponents. Moo commenting says, “It is absolutely vital to understand that the main point of this argument, expressed three times (in vv. 17, 20, and 26), is not that works must be added to faith, but that genuine faith *includes* works. That is its very nature.”⁸⁴ James emphasizes the union between faith and works. Rakestraw quoting Ropes says, “James’ real contention in vv. 20-22 is not so much of the necessity of works as of the inseparability of vital faith and works.”⁸⁵ For James, the mental facet of faith, which is necessary, is only *part* of the faith that justifies. James is going beyond this and exhorts a ‘completed,’ ‘perfected’ or ‘matured’ faith, which leads to salvation. Faith is a mental understanding of a doctrinal position, “combined with works, which he understands as ethical behavior, specifically works of mercy.”⁸⁶ James points to the dual aspect of faith when he wrote, “You see that a person is justified by what he *does* and not by *faith alone*” (2:24).⁸⁷ This dual aspect of faith is the amalgamation of orthodox belief with works.

⁷⁹ Robert H. Stein, 5.

⁸⁰ *ê pistis* translated “this faith” in verse 14, 17, and 20.

⁸¹ Jas 2:19.

⁸² Robert V. Rakestraw, “James 2:14-26: Does James Contradict The Pauline Soteriology?,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (1986): 36.

⁸³ Peter Davids, *James* (GNC: San Francisco: Harper & Roe, 1983), 49.

⁸⁴ Douglas J. Moo, 99.

⁸⁵ Robert V. Rakestraw, 37.

⁸⁶ Sharyn Dowd, 202.

⁸⁷ Emphasis mine.

Works

James is teaching that a person is justified by what he does. How does James define deeds? What are these deeds or works he mentions? The word “works” is used twelve times in this passage and always positively. Works are used to describe “loving mercy, kindness, and obedience to God.”⁸⁸ Traditionally these works are thought of as “acts of charity that fulfill the law of love” as demonstrated by verses 15-16, but Moo argues against this traditional interpretation. Moo broadens the scope of this interpretation to mean, “obedience to God” that includes these “acts of charity,” but not limited to them.⁸⁹ Moo writes:

...it is not clear that we can confine James’ ‘works’ to acts of charity. To be sure, he has just been speaking about activities that fulfill the law of love and cites as an illustration acts of charity in verse 15-16. But his specific examples, drawn from the lives of Abraham and Rahab (vv. 21-25), do not clearly involve acts of charity. Particularly in Abraham’s case, the focus is on his obedience to God *per se*, with no inkling of any charity shown to others.⁹⁰

Works mean, “anything done in obedience to God,” not just particular acts of charity. These works or anything done in obedience to God are a necessary facet of saving faith. These works are “post-conversion” works. James is teaching the inseparability of works and faith. It can be concluded that where there is no saving faith, there are no good works and that where there are no good works, there is no saving faith. Good works are not meritorious to salvation nor do they reserve the right for salvation.

While these works are post-conversion, James is not implying that these works are perfect works that uphold the requirements of the divine Law. These works are different in moral quality from the works of the unregenerate in that they are united with faith. Unregenerate men do not have faith; the good works they perform are as “dead” as the faith of James’ opponent who could not demonstrate his faith through works. True good works do not only outwardly conform to the Law of God, but they are done consciously for the sake of pleasing the Lord. These works spring from a desire to do the will of God flowing from a heart of love for God.⁹¹

Content of James 2:24

Of all the statements in *James*, there is none more controversial. At least on the surface, this verse comes the closest to contradicting Paul. Therefore, Davids calls this

⁸⁸ Robert H. Stein, 7.

⁸⁹ Douglas J. Moo, 101-2.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 540-1.

verse the *crux interpretum* not only for this book, “but New Testament theology in general.”⁹²

James writes, “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” Justification is by a faith that works—obedience to God—and not by faith alone. Applying the definitions above, the verse could be restated, “You see that a person is justified by a faith that demonstrates itself through obedience to God and not by a faith that is only an intellectual grasp of orthodoxy alone.” James is concluding his thesis by displaying the nature of true Biblical faith—a faith that works. He does not mention faith in the first part of the verse⁹³ because he assumes it. The nature of true faith is the essence of this section as well as the entire Epistle, though James makes no mention of it here nor did he in Rahab’s example. He is focusing on the works aspect of faith.

What James meant by “faith alone” was an intellectual understanding of orthodoxy that is dead.⁹⁴ James pointedly says, “not by *faith alone*” emphasizing that works accompany genuine faith. This union between faith and works is necessary for faith to have value. James concludes that a man is “justified by *what he does*” because this is the practical outcome of faith—obedience to God. The justification to which James was referring is a demonstration of one’s profession. True saving faith will result in a changed life that produces acts of obedience.⁹⁵ James never concludes that salvation is by works. He is teaching that saving faith is practical and is more than embracing theological propositions.

Relationship between Faith and Works

The relationship between faith and works is illustrated by the examples of Abraham and Rahab. James writes, “You see that his faith and his action were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” James connects Abraham’s faith with his works and concludes that together they made him righteous. The Greek word *sunêrgei* means, “work with.” It has the prefix *sun* meaning “with” in front of *ergôn*, which means, “work.” Verseput comments, “As Dibelius and others correctly recognize, the verb *sunêrgei* in verse 22a cannot be understood to mean that faith assists in the production of works for the common goal toward which both aim is not the stimulation of Abraham’s deeds but his justification before God.”⁹⁶ James is illustrating that his works “work with” his faith, and that his faith was “complete”⁹⁷ by his works. James does not mean that Abraham had a “weak” or “loveless” faith so that by works it became strong. Men either believe or not, as there is no degree of justifying faith.⁹⁸

⁹² Peter Davids, 130.

⁹³ “You see that a person is justified by what he does...”

⁹⁴ See verses 2:17, 20, 26.

⁹⁵ C. Ryan Jenkins, 68.

⁹⁶ Donald J. Verseput, “Reworking The Puzzle of Faith and Deeds in James 2:14-26,” *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 112-3.

⁹⁷ The word “complete” in the NIV is translated from the Greek *ετελειωθη* meaning “mature” or “perfect.”

⁹⁸ R. G. V. Tasker, 69.

James does not fight the concept that Abraham's relationship with God began by his trusting in God's promises. He simply is highlighting that his works were demonstrating his faith. If Abraham did not have this outward demonstration of works, then he would have fallen short of God's requirements for a "pure and faultless" religion.⁹⁹

Faith is primary and works alone do not save. "Works do not produce faith. James never entertains the idea that works can exist independently without faith."¹⁰⁰ Matthew Henry comments, "The best works, without faith, are dead...it is by faith that anything we do is really good, as done with an eye to God, in obedience to Him." He continues:

The most plausible profession of faith, without works, is dead: as a root is dead that produces nothing green, nothing of fruit. Faith is the root, good works are the fruits, and we must see to it to have both. We must not think that either, without the other, will justify and save us. This is the grace of God wherein we stand, and we should stand in it.¹⁰¹

Faith is the issue under discussion and not works. Faith that saves has works, not works independent of faith. Faith and works should not be viewed as separate; for James, they are a necessary unity. James does not have in mind the concept of faith plus works, but rather faith that works¹⁰² is what made Abraham righteous. Abraham's faith affected what he did and what he did affected his faith. His faith demonstrated itself through obedience to God while his obedience perfected his faith. James does not mean that there is a faith which cannot exist independent from works, for a dying person or a paralytic may have faith and not be able to perform a good work.¹⁰³

In *James*, the faith that was "dead" and "useless" was restricted to an intellectual understanding of theological truth without the outward manifestation of that truth. This faith is not faith at all, for it will not save because it has no practical usefulness. Faith requires both an intellectual understanding of the Gospel and an internalizing of this truth that results in trust (obedience) in Christ. James was contrasting a "confession of faith" to a "dynamic possession of faith."¹⁰⁴ A confession of faith alone, free from works of love, is intellectual and nothing more, but the dynamic possession of faith is a living faith that produced obedience to God that demonstrated a confession of faith.¹⁰⁵ James understood that justification was by faith that expressed itself through love—obedience to the Law. The Law is the standard of the moral life of holiness that reflects the character of God and therefore it is a permanent guide for men to follow.

⁹⁹ Mark Proctor, 325.

¹⁰⁰ Robert H. Stein, 14.

¹⁰¹ Matthew Henry, 792.

¹⁰² James B. Adamson, 130.

¹⁰³ Douglas J. Moo, 112.

¹⁰⁴ C. Ryan Jenkins, 65.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

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