 **A Faith That Works - James 2:14-26**

Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without **faith** it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Many claim to have “faith” in God but what does a faith that actually pleases God look like? In this section of James, we look at how the author confronts the church concerning their lack of genuine faith. It will become clear as we dig into this passage that faith is more than a set of orthodox beliefs or an intellectual knowledge of God. Rather a faith that works actually must “work.”

1. **Read the passage on your own**
2. **If you are in a group have someone read it out loud or read it aloud together**

**Bible Study Methods:**

**Observation** – **Make a list**. What do you see that stands out in the passage? Look for key words or phrases, comparisons or contrasts, and spiritual qualities of a follower of Jesus?

 **Faith That Works Requires Our Faith In Action (vv 14-19)**

James leaves the argument of impartial love (James 2:1-13) and begins to address the issue of authentic faith. Having addressed the issues of impartiality in the previous section this a practical transition dealing with the heart of the matter: was the faith of these early believers real or dead?

**Verse 14:** James asks a rhetorical question to his audience. A rhetorical question is a question asked more to emphasize a point rather than actually get an answer. James asks the readers point blank: **“What good is it if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that type of faith save him?”** James asks these questions knowing that the answers were an emphatic “NO”!

***Hebrews 11:1, “****Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”*

**Question:** Hebrews tells us that faith is a hope and an assurance. It does require a set of beliefs and knowledge but why do you think that James says that is not enough?

**vv 15-17:** James gives the reader an example to make his point. If you see a brother or sister needs clothes or food what do you do? In this example James is specific in whom he describes being in need. He says “brother or sister” meaning fellow believers. Certainly, we want to help all in need but remember Paul says in Galatians that we should do good to everyone but especially the “household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). James says that if you say “Go in peace and be warm and full” but you never actually meet their physical need, what have you actually accomplished? In the same way if you say you have faith in God and His Son Jesus Christ, how can you not have a life that is lived consistently in their image for the world to see. If a pious conviction ***(faith itself)*** does not result in obedience to Christ ***(does not have good works)*** then it is dead.

 ***Magnify the Scripture –*** Reference the following Scriptures to help emphasize the point James is making at the beginning of the passage:

* Luke 3:7-14 – John the Baptist rebukes the crowd
* Matthew 7:15-27 – Jesus speaks of religious activity versus true faith

**vs 18-19:** In these two verses James deals with a hypothetical counter to his argument concerning faith and works. He anticipates the reader would argue that faith and works are distinctive gifts. Some have faith and some have works. Paul did write that there are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit. Is it possible that someone could have faith and another person have works and the two not intersect one another? James is going to show why the answer is Absolutely Not!

James counters the counter with a challenge: Show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith BY my works. It is clear here that it is not possible to show evidence of faith without a physical display of action. What James understands here is the process of **sanctification** results in an inward transformation that results in an outward transformation. You cannot prove the inward transformation without an outward display of what is going on inward.

**Digging Deeper: *What is Sanctification? –*** The process in which God guides us to maturity, a practical, progressive holiness. It is the process in which we become more like Christ as we grow in His word and surrender to His will.

In verse 19 James makes a very sharp criticism that would really hit the Jewish believers in between the eyes. He takes a fundamental belief and uses it to make a point to that would shock the readers. He says, “You believe that God is one, you do well.” This was the basic belief of Judaism and Christianity. This comes out of the Shema, which was the main Jewish prayer prayed morning and evening and comes out of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. James’ statement was not to their credit as this was expected of them. James goes on to shock them by saying that demons believe the same thing! Basically, saying that their belief system or faith that they based their salvation on was a belief even the demons shared. What distinguished between a true faith and that of the demons was that true faith resulted in works that exemplified and glorified Christ.

 **Faith That Works In Action (vs. 20-26)**

James goes on to frame his argument. He makes the case in verses 14-17 by saying: Faith without works is dead. He then defends his argument by saying: I will prove my faith BY my works in verse 18 In these last verses James gives three examples to prove what this faith looks like in real life:

1. Abraham
2. Rahab
3. The Body and the Spirit

In verse 20 James speaks directly by calling the person who would argue with him a “foolish person.” This was questioning the moral character of those individuals. He goes on to say that he will show them why faith is useless without works because they both are required for a living faith.

**Abraham:** James gives us the example of Abraham willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at the command of God (Genesis 22). If you remember the story, Abraham and his wife Sarah waited decades for them to conceive. Finally, they conceived when Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham was over 100. This child was precious to them and God would test Abraham by telling him to sacrifice Isaac to Him. Abraham would go through with the act, going as far to raising the knife. At that moment God stopped him. It was an example of Abraham’s faith in God that he would not even withhold his own son to Him.

*****Bringing Truth to Light* –** There are many who think James contradicts the writings of Paul in which the great Apostle said that the saints are justified by faith alone (Romans 3:20, Romans 4:1-25, Galatians 3:6, 11). He too references Abraham from Genesis 15:6 where God first states that Abraham’s faith was accounted to him as righteousness. When James says that Abraham was justified by works, he is not contradicting Paul but rather is complementing Paul’s teaching. James had already made the points:

1. Salvation is a gracious gift. (James 1:17-18)
2. He quotes Genesis 15:6 which is what Paul uses to makes his defense of justification by faith.
3. Used an example of Isaac which was well after God declared Abraham righteous.

The point was that James was stating that faith is what justifies but it is not true faith unless it is accompanied by works. He was not contradicting Paul because Paul was clear that faith came by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) but was demonstrated by faithfulness (Ephesians 2:10).

**Rahab:** Rahab was the prostitute who believed in God and demonstrated that faith by hiding the Hebrew spies.

**The Body and the Spirit:** A body without the Spirit is a corpse. In the same way a faith without works is just as dead.



**Talking it over - Group Study:** What are some ways that we can make our faith evident to others?



**Interpretation – Ask a Question:** What is the author’s main intent or purpose of the passage?

* Ask a question about a word or an idea that you do not understand.



**Application – Put into practice**

* Think of a person that needs to go through this study.
* How can this study impact your relationship with others and with the Lord?



**Praying it through –** Take a moment to ask God to bring to light areas where you are not living out your faith. Confess that sin to God and ask Him to help show you in His word where you can learn and grow in that area. Pray for opportunities to live out your faith to your lost neighbors.



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