

James Part 6 - Study Notes

Introduction

James continues the theme that **real faith produces genuine love**. Nowhere does James more passionately argue and illustrate this theme than in James 2:14-26. If we say we believe like we should, then why do we behave like we shouldn't?

This section is the main thesis of the book. Everything before this passage is like an arrow pointing forward to it. Everything after is like an arrow pointing back. He asks two rhetorically questions, not expecting an answer but about to give one: James 2:14 *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?* People may call themselves Christians and claim to be part of the Christian faith, but do they have any genuine results to prove to those around them that their confession of faith is authentic? James said that their faith is of no use at all if they do not show it to others.

In verses 15 to 20 James gives a series of four characteristics of genuine faith. Genuine faith is not indifferent, but involved. James 2:15-16 *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?* James talked about brothers and sisters in genuine need of food and clothing. These people didn't even have the basics in life. They were in dire need. But the believers sent them away with a hollow cliché *go in peace; keep warm and well fed*. They **should have and could have** stepped up to help but they did not. 1 John 3:17 says *If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?* The Apostle John implied if we don't help then the love of God is not in us. Genuine love reaches out to others; real faith produces acts of compassion and kindness. So genuine faith is not indifferent but involved.

Genuine faith is not independent but in partnership. James 2:17 *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* James said that genuine faith is always accompanied by results. If it doesn't have results it is dead, and is therefore useless. It is the opposite to having a living, vibrant faith.

Genuine faith is not invisible but on display. James 2:18 *But someone will say, You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.* James is talking to people who would say: *I keep my faith to myself. It is a quiet, private faith.* But James challenges the idea of a private, passive faith: Genuine faith displays itself. If you can't see it then how can anyone know that it exists.

Genuine faith is not intellectual, but from the heart. James 2:19 *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder. ²⁰You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?* James talks about the religious intellectual. They know the facts and can recite the truth, but they don't live the life that matches what the truth says. *There is one God* comes directly out of the ancient confession of Judaism called the *Shema*. Deuteronomy 6:4 *Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God: The Lord is One!* Intellectually this person has got it in his head but it hasn't penetrated to his heart or made its way to his hands and feet. He seemed to be saying that faith that is merely intellectual have this in common with demons. Demons know the truth but have detestable works.

James 2:20 *You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?* James one again drives home the point that faith without works is useless. He reinforced that faith without works is dead. He is not saying that a person without faith is dead, but that such faith is useless, as good as dead as he did in James 2:14.

Friends if it is within our means to help our brothers and sisters it is not enough for us just to say, I'll pray for you. We are called to do what we can with what we have. This is a practical, hands-on action.

James used two biblical examples of inward faith demonstrated by obvious, outward actions. He selected two different people, two extremes: Abraham and Rahab. Abraham was the father of the Hebrews, a man of power and respect, the recipient of God's promises. Rahab, was a gentile harlot, a woman with a bad reputation, she broke God's moral laws. James 2:21-25 *Was not our father Abraham considered righteous*

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for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. ²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? James is saying that every Christian finds themselves somewhere between Abraham and Rahab. So James' message of faith and works applies to us all.

The author of Hebrews marvels at the faith of both of these characters. Hebrews 11: 17 *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,* and Hebrews 11:31 *By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.* These writers emphasize that these works are done by faith. Actions were the result of genuine faith within each believer, working out in practical, hands-on actions.

Lets just step back for a while for clarification. At the moment of salvation we are saved through faith and nothing else, The Apostle Paul taught this and James agrees with this. James focused at the fruit of salvation. After salvation the root of faith gets planted, then our lives will bear the fruit of good works.

The Apostle Paul looked at life from God's perspective; James looks at life from a human perspective. Paul used the word justified to mean declared righteous in the sight of God, even though I am still a sinner. **That's a gift.** James addressed believers who have already experienced the gift of salvation, so he used the word justified to mean, I demonstrate myself to be righteous in the sight of people to show that I have received the gift of eternal life. Paul showed how a believer becomes a Christian, James showed how a believer lives as a Christian. Paul emphasised the root of salvation, James emphasised the fruit of salvation. Paul demonstrated God's part with human participation; James demonstrates human part with God's help.

We know Abraham was a man of faith because we can see his ultimate act of faith in obeying the commands of God, even when it made absolutely no sense to him. Sacrificing his promised child made no sense. Abraham trusted in the absolute goodness and power of God, in spite of this incomprehensible command. Hebrew 11:19 says *Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.* Abraham believed that God could raise people from the dead. James concluded that Abraham was justified by works and not just faith alone.

Rahab was not an Israelite and therefore not a member of God's covenant people. Yet she *stepped out in faith* and believed that the God of Israel would keep His promises to Israel and give them the city. Rahab changed allegiance and demonstrated her change in faith from false gods to the *one true God*. Rahab and her household were spared **because** of her courageous act of faith.

James 2:26 *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.* Wherever we find separation we find death. It is true of the physical life when the soul is separated from the body there is death. It is also true of the Christian life when they have a life called *faith* but have nothing to demonstrate it as authentic then there is an abnormal separation between faith and works.

The book of James is about hands on Christianity. James does not want us to sit on our hands but to start to use them to do His work.