

Demystifying Faith Without Works #James2

#faithwithoutworksisdead

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[0:00] Faith, faith without works. James 2 is a scripture that is really one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted verses in the Bible.

! James 2 verse 20 it reads, ! But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Some take this to mean that we have to have good deeds to earn salvation. That faith that lacks good deeds is not genuine, not real faith.

Or they would say that you have to add good deeds or show good deeds to merit salvation, to earn salvation.

That's not what it's saying here. So hopefully I can unpack it as best as I can to explain it to you. Some of this material I've borrowed from various Bible teachers, including Andy Woods for one, that explains about James 2 verse 20.

[1:15] And to understand this first, you've got to look at the whole book, the book of James. Really, it's a very practical book. It's one of the most practical books in the Bible and it tells us how to live out our faith.

It's saying, for one, don't just be a hearer, but be a doer. James is teaching the subject of not positional righteousness, but practical righteousness.

So I'll try to unpack that a little. We've talked about that in recent Bible study times. That's the point of his book. It's practical righteousness.

It's faith practiced. It's faith actioned. And once we are saved, how should we live? That's the question that really James is addressing. Once we are saved, how are we to live?

James is addressing people who are saved. He's addressing the already saved. He's not writing a book about justification, about how to get saved.

[2:17] James is writing to them who are saved about sanctification. So James is not disputing about whether these people are saved.

What he wants for them is to become productive. That the faith that's in them would become useful faith. Useful faith, where it can accomplish some works.

James is talking about progressive sanctification. So it's more about the walk, about how we live out our faith. And our faith can be evidenced. And James and Paul both talk about Abraham.

But they're coming at it from different angles. So I've got a little chart later that kind of compares the two. And Romans 4 is talking about salvation. But James 2 is talking about service.

So it's just getting that distinction right. Because as I say, some people take this verse, especially those that are cultic kind of Mormons and such, that they would say, well, faith has got to be shown by our good works.

[3:21] And Catholics take the same kind of idea. Oh, well, faith isn't enough. You've got to have works. It's faith plus what we do. But really, if you understand what Paul says and understand what James says and understand the differences in what they're talking about, it all makes sense.

Paul is condemning the self-righteous. They think that they can be made right with God through their own good works. Whereas James is dealing with the people who are saved, but their Christian life is non-productive.

So Paul tells about Abraham's justification, talked of first in Genesis 15 verse 6. You've got to go right back to the book of Genesis to understand what Paul and James are talking about.

And they both refer to Genesis 15 verse 6, where it talks about Abraham's justification. Genesis 15 verse 6, it tells about Abraham. It says that Abraham believed in the Lord and he counted it to him

for righteousness.

James talks about Abraham, but in the book of James it's talking about what happened some 20, 30 years later in Abraham's life, where Abraham's faith became useful because he was willing at that point to sacrifice his son Isaac.

[4:44] So you've got Romans 4 verse 3, you've got James 2, 23, you've got Genesis 15 verse 6. They're connected, but they're not talking entirely of the same kind of thing.

So this is how someone's pictured it, but that's a bit hard for it to read. But here's how I've kind of put it in a little chart. So we see the comparison between Romans 4 and James 2.

In Romans 4, Paul is talking about justification. He's talking about how Abraham was declared righteous before God, that we receive that at the point of faith alone.

When Abraham believed, he received by faith, effectively in Christ, he received salvation. He was justified by faith.

And then when James talks about the same instance, as James using the word justification, he's talking about the usefulness of a believer's faith before man.

[5:53] So Paul in Romans is talking about justification before God. James is talking about service before man. Abraham's faith was demonstrated in his willingness to sacrifice his son.

So you see, in Romans 4 verse 3, when it's talking about Abraham, it's talking that Abraham was justified by faith. His faith was reckoned to him as righteousness in Genesis 15.

Then James later on, it's later on in Genesis, Genesis chapter 22, where he's about to sacrifice Isaac. It's more that he's demonstrating his faith before man.

That justification is showing the usefulness of his faith before man. So a person is justified by faith alone, apart from works for heaven. But he is justified by works for usefulness on earth.

So there are different concepts here. When Paul uses the word save, he's speaking about justification, that Abraham was saved by his faith. When James is using the word save, he's talking about this progressive sanctification, where it's the faith that's demonstrated and lived out.

[7:05] When Paul's using the word faith, he's speaking about saving faith. When James is using the word faith, he's speaking about the faith that is serving, that's living faith. So when Paul's talking about works, he's talking about the attempt by people to curry favour with God, by good works, somehow thinking that that makes them right with God.

But when James is talking about works, he's talking about the believers' good works, the works of the saved, the believers who are saved, that he's talking about their good works, that God produces in their life, which justifies that person in the presence of his fellow man.

So you can see that it's before man. In James it's before man, in Romans it's before God. James is talking about faith that's a useful faith, that it's a serving faith.

And so James says, faith without works is dead. Now some take this to mean, if there's not enough good works, then faith is non-existent, or it's not real faith, not genuine faith. This is not what it's saying, in my understanding of it.

And of course there's different Bible teachers who teach it differently, but as I say, Andy Woods and numbers of others describe it this way. I think this is the most clear way, because there's no conflict. Faith without works is dead.

[8:21] So when the Bible uses the word death, it never means non-existence. Death means a separation. James is saying such faith is useless, it's non-productive.

Some people misunderstand James too, to mean that they have to be constantly measuring their good works, to see if they have enough good works in their lives. Some can even question then, whether they're Christians or not, because it's all about looking at your own works, and seeing, am I demonstrating enough works?

Am I showing my faith by my works? And there's believers out there, who don't know if they're saved or not. They've trusted in Christ, but they don't really know, if their faith is authentic faith, because they've got this idea, well my faith is all about my performance.

I've got to be showing my faith. But we're not meant to be looking at our own performance, whether somehow we have enough good works of our own. We don't look at our own life to see if we are

saved.

We look to our Lord. We look to our Lord, who's transferred his own righteousness unto us. So with Abraham, it says that his faith was reckoned, it was considered, it was counted as righteousness. [9:34] And it's the same for you and me, that it's not our works that make us righteous, it's our faith. James is asking, when he says about this kind of faith, that is without works, he's saying, is your faith productive?

Is it a living faith? Many have the idea that, if they've not got sufficient good works, then their faith is non-existent, that it's not genuine. But salvation does not depend on you, and upon your works. It's about what your faith is in, what your trust is in. If your trust is in Christ, as your saviour, then you're saved. That's the simple transaction. It depends really and entirely, on whether, you're depending upon what Jesus, our Lord, has done for you.

If you're trusting that Jesus died on the cross for your sin, and if you've got that willingness to receive that, that gift of salvation by faith, as a free gift, and we've got the promise of God, as our Lord Jesus tells to us, verily, verily, he says, this is absolutely true.

He says, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death, unto life.

[10:51] It's that transfer, that transition, that we're taken from death, unto life. And so, that moment, that you trust Christ, that you take Christ for yourself, for your saviour, then you can 100% know, that if you were to die, you'd go directly into the presence of your Lord.

When you are saved, you have eternal life, you have eternal security, and you have an assurance of salvation. Salvation is not dependent on your worthiness, certainly not on your works, it's not on your fitness, it's not that you can gain any merit, for anything that you do.

And God says that at that moment, that you trust Christ, that moment that you receive Christ, that very moment, you have eternal life, everlasting life. And that's the big question, have you placed your trust, in Christ alone, for your salvation?

That's how you can know, that as you go to your grave, you can go there with joy, with courage, with a certainty, I'm saved, because of the promise of God. I've believed on him, so I have everlasting life.

You've trusted the promise of God, and so are saved people. There's that assurance that you have. And then as saved people, God wants that your faith be productive.

[12:10] He doesn't want you to have a faith, that's unproductive. And so this is where James takes it on. So Romans 4, it talks about that salvation, justified by faith. James 2, it talks about that faith then, that's enacted, that's put into action, that's activated.

And God wants us, James tells us, for your faith to be productive, for it to be producing. And so James poses these questions, through the book of James, are you visiting the widows and orphans, in their distress?

Are you keeping yourself, unspotted from the world? Are you not showing favouritism, in the church, as there was some that was showing, some kind of respect of persons? Are you adopting that right mindset of God, as to your trials?

James talks about, where the rubber hits the road, the trials of life. Have you got that right attitude? So we can have a saving faith, and yet we can lack a serving faith. We can be saved, without any works.

We can be saved, entirely without any works of our own. But James says, no, take it further. Let that faith be producing faith. Let that saving faith, be serving faith.

[13:14] Let that faith that you have, that you know your saviour, let that be a faith that's activated, and lived out. You can't have saving faith, but lacks the serving faith.

But think of it, if there's no works, how can you be fully rewarded, at the judgement seat of Christ? It tells for us, that for believers, there will be a judgement seat of Christ, that will go to a judgement, before our Lord.

Not a judgement for our salvation, but a judgement of our works. And if there's no works, how can we be rewarded there? How can God use you, for his purposes on the earth?

How can your faith be useful? How can your faith be productive, if there's no works? So again, as it says of Abraham, Genesis 15 verse 6, and he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him, for righteousness.

When did Abraham's faith, become productive? James is talking about, Genesis 22. It's not that Abraham, was saved in Genesis 22.

[14:23] That was later. That was some 20 to 30 years, later on. It was at Genesis 22, there he was willing to sacrifice, his son Isaac.

He was justified before God, 20 to 30 years earlier than that. When he believed in Genesis 15, he was justified by faith. Then in Genesis 22, is where his faith was demonstrated, as James talks about.

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him, for righteousness. As in Romans 4 verse 5. Abraham received Christ's righteousness then, by faith. When he believed, he was justified then, declared righteous.

He was not declared righteous, because of what he did, but because of what he believed. And it's the same for us today. The cults would tell us, oh, you've got to believe, but you've got to do this, that, and the other thing.

Abraham was saved, Genesis 15, when he believed in the Lord. And God gives his righteousness, only to those who do not work for it, but instead put their faith on Christ.

[15:34] The whole idea of James then, is unpacking more the productivity, of our faith, not the existence of faith. We're not saved on the basis, of our own effort. Abraham was saved in Genesis 15, when he believed, when he first believed.

And it's the same for you and me, we're saved, not on the basis of our own effort. Yet our works, as saved people, will be rewarded. So it's not to discount, that our faith should not be working.

It ought to be working faith. One day our works, will be rewarded, at the judgment seat of Christ.

That's a different aspect. So James is talking about, applying faith to life.

It's not a challenge in James, to be born again. James isn't talking about that. He's challenging believers, right through the book. Talking about brethren, numbers of times it speaks about brethren.

James is addressing believers. He's challenging believers, to be willing to apply, the word of God to your life, to live out your life, for the benefit of others, for the glory of God. So James has written, to believers for saved people.

[16:36] We look at, through the word of God, you've got to take, the whole context of the book. When we see, for example, the Philippian jailer, and he said to them, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And when the man posed the question, he said, Sirs, what must?

What must I do? It's got this sense, of absolute necessity. What's the essential thing? What must I do? What's absolutely necessary? He says, what must I do, in the present tense, to be saved?

And the answer, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's it. According to the Bible, salvation is a gift. It's not of works, nothing to do with our works, our behaviour, or our conduct.

So James is not even talking about, how to be saved in James 2. Whereas the cults would take that, and misapply it, misconstrue it. James is talking about, what happens after, you're saved.

[17:36] That your faith, should be such that, you're living it out, you're activating it. He's talking about, what happens after you're saved. Really, he's talking about rewards, in heaven too. Some would take this verse, and then live with this, constant wondering, is my faith, really stacking up?

Is it there, or is it not? Constantly living in this, doubtfulness. This doubt, this constant doubt, and uncertainty. But if you read, the whole book of James, you take it in this context, you read the five chapters, oft times it talks about, my brethren, or such terms.

James is talking, not to lost people, but to the saved. James is talking to people, who are already saved, as to how they'll be held, accountable one day, for rewards. And if they've done no works, they'll have no rewards.

So, this is not to say, forget about works. This is to say, understand what James, is saying about works. And he says this, in James 2, 14, he says, what does it profit, my brethren?

Again, speaking to brethren, he's talking to believers. What does it profit, my brethren? Though a man saying, he hath faith, and have not works, can faith save him? Notice he's talking to believers, he's saying, notice the word profit.

[18:48] Words like profit, or gain, or rewards, they all talk about, what we can gain, after we are saved. Profit, gain, rewards, they talk about, what we gain, after we are saved.

So, here's a, a whole load of scriptures, that show us about salvation. The Bible talks about salvation, we've got to take the whole context, of the book, of what the Bible tells us, about salvation, and over 600 times, it has something to say, about salvation.

And we see here, justification by faith alone, is a very common theme, it's a common thread. And James is not talking, about salvation in James 2.

Without exception, you'll never find, eternal life spoken of, as a reward, or profit. So that's an important point. James 2, what does it profit? He's talking about profit, he's talking about reward. And you can consider, you could kind of, look in parallel, with 1 Corinthians 3, where Paul talks about, the judgment seat of Christ. He's talking about, a time of rewards.

[19:55] And he tells us about, how there's no other foundation, that a man can lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. He's again, Paul's talking to believers here.

He's saying that, when we're saved, we've got this foundation, that we're building our lives upon, it's Jesus Christ. That moment, that you trust Christ, you're building a life on him. That moment, that you're born again, you're building on that foundation, who is your saviour.

And then, Paul reads on, about how we can build, on this foundation. He says, if any man build, on this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, word, hay, stubble.

He's talking about, how we, apply, we invest our life, in lots of ways. And, sometimes it's, things that are going to last, the gold, silver, precious stones, things that are to the glory of God.

And then there's, the works of the flesh of man, our own vain efforts, word, hay, stubble. That's going to be burnt up. One day, at the judgment seat of Christ, our works are going to be made manifest.

[20:57] It says, the day is going to declare it. It's going to be tested by fire. And the fire is going to test, every man's work, of what sort it is. Whether there's, going to be, a, work that's worthy of reward, or not.

And then we look at, 1 Corinthians 3, 14, it says, if any man's work abide, which he have built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. So there will be a profit. There will be a reward for you.

So faithful believer, those things that you are doing for the Lord, there's a benefit, there's a reward, that it will be acknowledged. That service that you render, there's going to be a reward.

There's going to be an eternal, that you will receive a reward, a profit, or a gain. But then it says, if any man's work, shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss, but he himself, shall be saved, yet so as by fire. So it's saying here, you're saved, but for some, there's going to be, a suffering of loss. Your work's going to be burnt up. There's going to be, a loss of reward. That's really what James, is kind of, referring to here.

[22:06] In other words, if you're not living for Christ, there's going to be, a regret. There's going to be some regret. As you stand before God's judgment, for believers, there's going to be, a suffering of loss.

But notice they're saved. They're still saved. So you can be a believer, who's got nothing much to show, for your life, but you can be saved, yet so as by fire.

So your salvation, is not about your works. Some would make it, that you've got to work, for your salvation. You've got to deserve it. You've got to earn it. You've got to merit it. But it's not about that. You shall be saved, yet so as by fire. Because we don't want to be that person, that their works are all burnt up, that their life is misspent. But for some, they are saved.

They're not living for Christ. They will be ashamed. They will suffer loss. Not a loss of their salvation, but a loss of rewards. That's the meaning here. They shall suffer loss.

[23:04] Not a loss of their salvation, but there'll be a loss of rewards. So from the moment, that you trust Christ, you are saved. Saved forever.

That's the assurance. That's the promise of God. But then after you're saved, after you're saved, as you live for Christ, he will reward, whatever you've done for him. But if you haven't lived for him, you'll suffer the loss of reward.

So whatever way you look at it, don't be a lazy Christian. That's what it's saying, really, isn't it? James is warning believers, what profit are you going to have if you have faith, but have no works? Can faith save you from the consequences of the judgment seat of Christ? James is urging us to invest your life, to make your life such that you're investing it in the kingdom of God.

that what we say, what we do, there will be a reward for it because it will be a good work. It's going to be something that the Lord is going to be pleased with. We're not commending having no works.

[24:13] The Bible's warning us, if you have no works, then you're going to have no rewards at the judgment seat. Do God's will because then there will be a profit. We're not going to suffer loss.

There will be a reward. There will be a benefit. There will be a gain eternally. It talks about laying up for yourselves treasure in heaven. There's a sense where there's an eternal dimension that we're putting ourselves into even in the present.

So works do have a reward. Works have to do with reward, but they've got nothing to do with salvation. That's where the cults get it wrong. That's where every other non-biblical religion gets it wrong.

They make it about your works. It's not about that. You can't earn your salvation. So all believers go to heaven. One day our works are going to be examined.

So it's telling us here, 1 Corinthians 3, other scriptures too, talk about the judgment seat, the judgment seat of Christ. All of our works are going to be measured. And there'll be a degree of reward of some description.

[25:18] On the other side we see of unbelievers, all unbelievers will go to hell. And they'll have a separate judgment for themselves. And their works will be examined as to degrees of punishment in hell.

We can understand. So believers go to heaven and have a judgment that will determine the degree of reward based upon the works. But unbelievers will go to hell and receive a judgment, a punishment of hell.

James is not saying that a person with dead faith has no faith or that he is unsaved. Some would interpret that way. But rather he is saying that this person is not living by faith.

It's alike to this picture here. They've got no works to show but they are saved. They will suffer loss. There's no profit to them. They're not trusting and obeying God like they ought to.

So it's useless, dead faith. But they are still saved. James is encouraging his readers to put their faith into practice. The key that unlocks it all is that we're justified before God by faith.

[26:25] This is the cornerstone that unlocks the meaning of all of these other scriptures that we've talked about tonight. As it says in Romans 5 verse 1, Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're justified by faith before God. And then James kind of relates we're justified before man by our works.

In other words, people are going to see that you're a Christian and they're going to say, yeah, you're going to be justified in the sight of man by your works. Salvation is free.

Rewards are earned. You think about salvation. Christ paid the price for our salvation to save us from hell. But what you have when you get to heaven, rewards, those are earned.

There's a sense where there's some extra bits, there's some extra benefits that there are rewards. That's about how you live. So it's good to have that context.

[27:32] How am I going to live for Christ? That there'll be some rewards. Salvation is not a reward. That's a gift, right? That's the difference. Salvation is a gift. The rewards are more about your life that you live.

The outcome of your life. So as you trust in Christ, you have the free gift of salvation. You're justified by faith. There's no works whatsoever involved there.

Going to heaven is totally on the work of Christ, the merit of Christ who died for you. And then on the other side, the sanctification side, he wants you to serve him.

He wants you to have rewards. He wants you to live your life for his glory. But he doesn't make you serve him. Faith without works is dead.

The purpose of faith is to glorify God. The works do not justify us or make us righteous before God, nor are they the means to salvation. And yet we are created unto good works.

[28:33] I know it's like a twofold thing here. The salvation is entirely by faith, not of works. The walk with God, where there are rewards, where there will be some profit, there will be some heavenly gain, there will be acknowledgement before the judgment seat of Christ.

Christ, that's the extra that he adds. So the works, they do not justify us or make us righteous. Yet we are created to do good works.

We see, it tells us we should maintain good works. It's something we should do that we be not unfruitful. God wants you to be fruitful. He wants you to bear fruit.

Good works are part of that bearing fruit. Saving faith without works is useless. In other words, it's unprofitable, it's unproductive. Yet it says, but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

So, some that would say, well, you've got to have works. Well, this says the opposite, doesn't it? Romans 4 verse 5. It says, to him that worketh not, but believeth, you're justified.

[29:42] It says that you're counted righteous. So, the amazing thing is, it's simple faith, it's simple trust in Christ that is what justifies the ungodly. And God declares you righteous.

So, we say, by grace, through faith, that not of ourselves, not of our works, no amount of human effort, no morality or good deeds can earn us salvation. That's not of it.

And we're all equally blessed to have the gift and we all equally need it. It says, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

So, when you look at that, that justification, just as if I'd never sinned, the sense where God takes all of the weight of our sin, all of the guilt of it and justifies us, declares us righteous, it's all the merits of God, it's all the grace of God, it's all the free gift of God, we're justified freely.

And it's through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. So, the glory of salvation is all entirely to God. It's solely to the glory of God, isn't it? It's entirely the glory of God. The Bible teaches us that salvation is, by grace, through faith, a gift that we cannot earn by our works.

[30:59] We cannot earn it, nor do we deserve it. We are to trust fully, fully depend on the completed work of Jesus Christ at the cross. Of course, it follows that we are to work, so, that's the second aspect.

So, again, we've read this one, by grace you're saved through faith. It's the gift of God, not of works. But, then it goes on to say, we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we walk in them.

So, we're saved without the works, but he wants us to be his workmanship. He wants us to be living the good works. He wants us to be living out the good works.

He's ordained that we should walk in those good works. So, salvation is, by grace, through faith, not of works, that our works should be that follow on after salvation, that we live it out.

And, really, it's all about our Lord, isn't it? It's not my good works, plus Jesus. It's not my efforts, plus Jesus. It's not my church attendance, plus Jesus.

[32:07] All of these things here. It's not my obedience, plus Jesus. It's not my, my works, plus Jesus. It's only Jesus, isn't it? It's not of works.

And the minute we start to add something that I do, we're adding to the, the finished work. there's no point adding to the finished work, because it's completed at the cross.

The Bible's very clear cut that salvation is a gift from God. While we are not saved by good works, Ephesians 2.10, as we just read, shows that we are to live out our faith.

That's the, the outworking of the faith. That's the outworking of the Christian walk. And as it reads in Matthew 5, verse 16, in this dark world, we're meant to be shining, shining lights, that our light should shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in

heaven.

So, good works are that, outworking of that salvation that we have. It's not part of the salvation. It's that, as saved people, this is God's will, that they may see your good works.

[33:17] So, God helping you, you'll be those people, who'll be his workmanship, is why you're created. He created you. He saved you, such that you would have a faith that is outworked, and living out, and evident.

So, your faith will be shown to be, that living faith. I pray you'd be encouraged here tonight, to, if you've yet to trust Christ, that salvation is, that trust.

It's that trust. And, and as saved people, we could think, how can my faith be lived out? James talks about those practical ways, you can outwork your faith, that you can live that faith, such that the world will see, that you belong to him.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that, you give us salvation as a gift. Lord, we don't deserve it. We can't earn it, merit it. We can't work for it, or add to it.

Yet, Lord, we are the called people of God, to, called unto good works, called to be, lights that shine, called to live out, as living testimonies, of your grace to others.

[34:22] Lord, help us to be such a people. Lord, we know that, the reward time will come, not that salvation is a reward, it's, it's entirely a gift, but, that you want our faith, to be outworked, such that, at the judgment seat of Christ, that our works will be, shown, as works that will stand.

Works that, are to your glory. Works that, are true works. Lord, help us to be a faithful people, that our faith will be lived out, in such a way, that it will be, a productive faith.

A faith that, yields results, and, that there will be, an eternal benefit. Lord, not for our glory, but, entirely for your praise. Help us to be a people, that want to be, living testimonies, that, that want to be, those living, examples, those ambassadors, for you, Lord, in this world, that we represent you, to our world around us, as we go about, our lives in our, home place, our school place, our workplaces, Lord, that will have, that heart, to live, for you, and for your glory.

Help us, Lord, to have such a faith, that is, truly, a living faith. Lord, we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Thank you.