

Faith & Works (James 2:14-26; Romans 3:28)

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[0 : 00] This week we're going to be continuing in our study of the book of James as we look at James chapter 2 starting in verse 14 and working our way through the end of James chapter 2.

So it'll be verses 14 through 26. And as you make your way there, I want to run something by you this morning. How many people in here love it when somebody tells you one thing, but then they do something completely different with their life?

They give you advice on how to live your life, but then they do something completely different with theirs. Maybe it's a politician that says you should be doing this or that. This is one of the things you should be valuing.

Then you look at their life and they're not even doing any of those things. I'm sure we all love that. Or maybe a restaurant owner who goes on and on and on talking about how wonderful their food is and how much better their food is than anybody else's food.

But then they don't eat their own food. They don't actually eat it. Or maybe as we think about these things, some of those other instances could be a boss who claims the importance of having a work-life balance.

[1 : 08] Where they talk a big game. Yes, you need to take those vacation days. Make sure you make time for your family. But then every time you go to try to take the vacation, they give you that look like, again?

Are we doing this again? And so I'm sure we all love people who claim one thing, but then they live their lives completely different, right? Of course not. Those things frustrate us.

And we see the differences in there. In each of these examples, there's a difference between what is claimed and what is actually done. The actions don't match the claim.

In each of these examples, it is the actions of the people that tell us what they really believe far more than what they say. You see, our claims are not always an accurate reflection of what we actually believe, but our actions rarely lie.

Sam Albert, he puts it this way. He says, Let me say that again.

[2 : 12] He says, We don't always live what we say we believe, but we do always believe what we live out. And this is true when it comes to our walk with Christ as well.

And it's one of those things that James addresses in our passage today. And so if you've had a chance to turn to James chapter 2, I invite you to follow along as we read verses 14 through 26. And this is what the word of the Lord says. It says, What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

So faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, You have faith and I have works.

[3 : 14] Show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe and shudder.

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

You see, that faith was active with his works. And faith was completed by his works. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

And he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead. And so there's a couple observations that I want us to make from this passage today.

[4 : 26] But before we get into those observations, I want us to make a comparison. I want us to take a verse from this passage and compare it to another verse that is found in Romans.

And let that be kind of the key to our understanding of this passage that hopefully will help us to understand these observations in a greater way. So to begin with, what I want us to do before we dive too deeply into this passage is I want us to see justification according to Paul and justification according to James.

And really justification according to Jesus because that's where it originates. And so it's looking at these passages to see the comparison. You see, we're going to be looking at one of the most challenging passages in all of Scripture when it comes to understanding our salvation.

This passage that we will look at today is a passage that caused many to be frustrated. It led Martin Luther to say many different things about the book of James.

But when he got to this section, he says that he was ready to throw Jimmy in the stove. He was just ready to be done with this. I'm ready to be done with this passage. I want to just move on past it.

[5 : 41] I'm ready to throw Jimmy in the stove. But I hope and pray that when our time is done this morning that we do not feel the same way. But that we see that both Paul and James aren't contradicting each other.

But they're actually coming together and complementing one another. But to help us see this issue at hand, I want us to do a side-by-side comparison.

And so if you have that copy of God's Word, I want you to put one finger there in James. But then also turn over to Romans chapter 3. Romans chapter 3.

And we're going to look at verse 28. And this is what Romans 3.28 says. This is what Paul is saying. He says this. Let me read that one more time.

It says, For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. And then let's turn back over to James chapter 2 verse 24.

[6 : 47] And it says this. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. You can see where some people have a hard time with this passage, can't you?

If you just take these two verses and don't look at the context in which they were written, you'll look at these two verses and think, well, there's a contradiction here. Which one is it?

Are we justified by faith or are we justified by works? Because it seems like these things are in contradiction to each other. It seems like there's something going on here.

And so you can understand where some people have an issue with this. Paul in Romans says that we are justified. That is that we are made right before God by faith in Christ.

Not by works of the law. Not by what we do. But what has been done for us. And hopefully we can all hear that and give that a hearty amen, right?

[7 : 48] That we are justified by faith. Not anything that we do. That we can't do anything to save ourselves. But it's only by what has been done for us on the cross.

And we all say amen to that. Absolutely. But then we also get to this passage here in James 2 24. And it says, you see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

And that seems pretty clear and straightforward as well. So it begs the question, is there a contradiction here? Is there a contradiction between the teachings of James and the teachings of Paul?

And the answer is, of course not. Absolutely not. There's not a contradiction here. In fact, not only are they not contradicting each other, they're complementing one another. And the context of their writing is helpful in understanding this.

You see, each of them is writing about the exact same gospel. Yet they are writing from different vantage points. They are addressing different problems in the church they are writing to.

[8 : 52] David Platt, he gives a really helpful visual to help us understand this. He says, I don't picture James and Paul standing toe-to-toe with each other with contrary understandings of the gospel.

He says, they're not standing toe-to-toe going back and forth arguing about the gospel. He says, rather he sees them as back-to-back defending the same gospel against different threats that are coming into the church.

Different threats to the gospel that people are saying. Different discrepancies that people are saying about the gospel. And so they're standing back-to-back defending the faith here.

Paul is fighting against a false understanding that we can somehow earn our salvation based on our works. That we can be good enough. That we can be generous enough.

Or we can go to church enough to finally earn God's favor. If I can just be good enough. If I can just do enough good things. Then maybe God will look at me and overlook all of the sin and all of those things.

[9 : 57] And so this is what Paul is writing to argue against. And Paul is saying that there's nothing you can do to save yourself. But then James here.

James on the other hand is fighting against an easy believism. That has reduced faith into Christ to simply right knowledge. Where someone could say that as long as you believe the right thing.

As long as you could answer the questions correctly on a test. Then you're covered. You're good. You can then live however you want to live. And I would argue that in the church and the culture that we live in today.

That we struggle with both of these same issues. I would argue that we as a culture in the context in which we live in today. That we struggle with both of these issues.

It's not just one that we struggle with. But both of these enemies of the gospel have found their way into culture. There are many who could. You could ask the question.

[11 : 00] Are you saved? Or are you going to heaven? And they'll answer to you. And they'll give you an answer to that question as. I sure hope so. I hope that I've lived good enough life.

I hope that I've done enough good things to outweigh the bad things. I hope that when I die one day God will look at my life and says. You barely squeezed by. You did just enough to save yourself.

And so there's some that fall into that trap of believing. That there's something you can do to add to your salvation. That you can somehow save yourself. And at the same time there are plenty of people who you can ask that question to.

Are you saved? Are you going to heaven one day? And their answer would be yes. I was baptized a long time ago. So I'm covered now.

Even though their life looks no different than the rest of the world. They claim to have a life-changing relationship with Jesus with no life change at all.

[12 : 04] And so while we look at this we need now as much as ever. We need the words of Paul in Romans 3 28. And we need the words of James in James 2 24. And we need to see that these as they truly are not opposed to one another.

But as complementary to one another. And it's my hope and prayer that as we work through this passage today. That God will open our eyes to the clear message of the gospel.

That salvation is a gift from God. And it's not something that you can earn by your works. But it is also a gift that produces works in your life.

So as we consider this this morning. There's a couple of observations that I want us to see. And to begin with is this. True knowledge does not lead to true faith.

True knowledge does not automatically lead to true faith. James here in verse 14 says. What good is it my brothers. If someone says he has faith but does not have works.

[13 : 12] Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food. And one of you says to them. Go in peace. Be warmed and be filled.

Without giving them the things needed for the body. What good is that? So also faith by itself. If it does not have works is dead.

But someone will say. You have faith and I have works. Well show me your faith apart from your works. And I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one.

You do well. Even the demons believe. And shudder. Now there's some pretty direct words that we must deal with here. As we look at this passage.

What good is it my brothers. If someone says he has faith. But does not have works. Can that faith save them? In other words. If a person states that he or she believes all the right doctrines.

[14 : 10] But their life does not show obedience to Christ. What good is this type of faith? And the answer that's implied here is it's no good at all.

That's a dead faith. That faith is no good. That's not even a faith that you could consider being faith. If we place our faith and our trust in Jesus. Then it's a life changing thing.

Billy Graham said many wonderful things. But one of the things that he says. He says most people are going to miss heaven by 18 inches. He says they know all the right stuff.

They know all the right doctrines. They can ace a theology test. They know the right doctrine that's there. But it hasn't been something that's made it into them. They're going to miss it by 18 inches. It's not something that they've given their life to. And that's what we see James talking about here. And he does this and he illustrates it in different ways. But one of the things he does.

[15:08] He says think of it like this. If a brother or sister is poorly clothed. And lacking in daily food. And one of you says to them go in peace. Be warmed and be filled. Without giving them the things needed for the body.

What good is that? How loving is it to say that you want someone to know about Jesus. That you want their needs to be met. Without actually doing anything about it.

Charles Spurgeon reflecting on this. He said if you're going to give a hungry man a tract. Like a gospel tract. He said if you're going to give a hungry man a tract.

Make sure you wrap it up in a sandwich. Make sure that you show them the love of Christ. And then let that point them to Christ. As you share the gospel message with them.

The observation is clear here. You can have good theology. You can know the truth about who God is. And still not have a saving faith.

[16:06] David Platt notes. He says from the beginning in 2.14. James is saying that it is possible to claim to have faith. But not actually have it.

To claim to have faith. But not be saved. James says even the demons believe the right theology about it. Even the demons believe and they should.

Or when you look at the gospels. And Jesus would encounter someone who is demon possessed. What would typically happen? That person would fall flat on their face. And the demon would be afraid.

Because the demons recognized who it was. The demons know there's only one God. The demons believe that Jesus is his son. But they are not saved. They haven't given their life to this. The final observation that I want us to see this morning.

As we understand this. As James has gotten our attention. By showing us that true knowledge does not lead to true faith. Is this. True faith in God produces faithfulness to God.

[17:09] True faith in God produces faithfulness to God. Starting in verse 20. It says. Do you want to be shown you foolish person. That faith apart from works is useless.

He says. Let me give you an example. Was not Abraham our father justified by works. When he offered up his son Isaac on the altar. You see that faith was active along with his works.

And faith was completed by his works. And the scripture was fulfilled that says. Abraham believed God. And it was counted to him as righteousness. And he was called a friend of God.

You see that a person is justified by works. And not by faith alone. And in the same way. Was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works. When she received the messengers.

And sent them out by another way. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead. So also faith apart from works is dead.

[18:11] What James is communicating here. What James is saying to us here in this passage. Is that faith in Christ produces faithfulness to Christ.

James says. Do you want me to prove it to you? Do you want me to show you? Do you want me to give you an example of this? And then he says. Let's think about the lives of a couple of people you may be familiar with.

Abraham and Rahab. And let's just take Abraham's life for an example this morning here. So James refers back to a couple of passages in Genesis. To show how Abraham was justified.

The way that James uses justified here. Is a little different than the way that Paul uses justified. And some of his uses. When James says. Was not Abraham our father justified by his works.

When he offered up his son Isaac on the altar. He's using it in a very similar way that Jesus does. Back in Matthew 11. When he says. Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.

[19:12] In this context. It means more along the lines of. Validated or demonstrated. In other words. Abraham's faith was demonstrated by his works.

And we know this. Because of the order in which the references occur in Genesis. Genesis. James says in 2.23. Abraham believed God.

And it was counted to him as righteousness. This is a reference that actually goes back to Genesis chapter 15. When Abraham believed God. And at that moment.

It was credited to him as righteousness. This is well before he ever offered. Was ready to offer up Isaac on the altar. And so it's this faith that is justifying Abraham.

But then it's demonstrated through his actions. And this is what James is saying. Is calling us to. This faith was demonstrated by the fact that he was willing to offer up Isaac.

[20 : 09] And after clearly getting our attention with all these things. This talk about dead faith. Then James is telling us here what true faith looks like.

He gives us an example here. He shows us what true faith looks like. And what we see is that true faith produces fruit. True faith produces fruit.

Jesus tells us the same thing on the Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount he says. So every healthy tree bears good fruit. But the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit.

Nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. For every tree that does not bear good fruit. Is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Jesus is saying. He says do you want to know how you can tell the difference between true prophets and false prophets? Look at their lives. Look at the fruit of their lives.

[21 : 08] You'll be able to know them by their fruits. The true prophets are going to produce the fruit that I'm talking about. It's going to be evident in who they are. And in a similar way James is saying.

Do you want to know what authentic faith looks like? Then look it for fruit. Look it for fruit in your life. Look for fruit in the other's lives. Claims are not always an accurate reflection of what we actually believe.

But our actions rarely lie. Now I can't tell you the difference between too many varieties of trees. Some of you may can go out in the woods and just identify every single type of tree that's out there. Who knew that we have multiple types of pine trees in North Georgia? Does anybody know that we have multiple types of pine trees? Okay everybody did but me. Okay but you have all these different types of pine trees.

There are these different types of oak trees. When I look out at the woods I just see a bunch of trees that are out there. But even somebody like me who can't tell the difference between trees.

[22 : 13] If I drive over to Long Creek South Carolina right now. Especially this time of the year. I can go up. And if you've been to Long Creek South Carolina then you'll understand this illustration.

But I can go there and look at all of these trees that are planted. And I can pretty easily tell you that's an apple tree. You know how I can tell that's an apple tree? Because it has apples on it. Because there's apples that are hanging down. So even somebody like me when I look at the trees over in Long Creek South Carolina. We have all of these apple orchards. I can look at those and there's an apple tree.

And I know that because it has apples hanging down. I know it because of its fruit. An apple tree produces apples because it is an apple tree on the inside.

The fruit is the byproduct of what it is. If it is a healthy apple tree guess what it's going to produce? Apples.

[23 : 10] Absolutely. If it's a healthy apple tree it's going to produce apples. And I've told you this before on a number of occasions. But I had an ethics professor who said one time. He says do you want me to give you an equation that will tell you what you actually believe about something?

And who wants to know what they actually believe? I think we all want to know what they actually believe. He says I've got an equation for you. He says the equation is this. Stated belief plus actual practice equals actual belief.

He says you can say whatever you want to say. But your actions will show what you actually believe. For example I could get up here and I could say I believe that I can fly.

I absolutely I'm going to tell everybody in here I can fly. And if I wanted to right now I could just fly out of these doors and just go flying around all over all over to go.

And I could even just give you a passionate argument how I believe that I can fly. But if you take me up in an airplane and you open the door without a parachute and says all right we'll prove it.

[24 : 12] Let's see if you can fly. You know what I'm not going to do? I'm not going to jump out of that plane. Even if you put a parachute on me I'm not going to jump out of the plane. But our actions

show what we actually believe.

Our actions are evident to what we actually believe. You can say that Jesus is Lord of your life. You can know all the right answers to questions about theology. But your actions are going to reveal what you truly are giving your life to.

Alistair Begg says it this way. He says a sincere claim to have faith is not necessarily synonymous with a sincere faith. Faith is belief that leads to action.

This past summer like most summers our family spent a lot of time down at Catherine's parents house. They have a house on Lake Hartwell and we like to go down there and the kids love to swim around.

And they have this two-story dock that's there. And the kids like to go up there and jump off of the dock into the water. Now don't get worried. Catherine makes sure that we all have life jackets on.

[25 : 16] And so when we go swimming there. But the kids love to jump out there. And all of the older grandchildren have done this for years now. But Charlotte, our youngest, she decided that she wanted to do that this year.

And so she goes up there. She gets right to the edge of that dock. She looks over it. And we say, all right, Charlotte, you ready? One, two, three, jump. She doesn't jump.

We say it over and over again. We count backwards. Three, two, one, jump. We're like, Charlotte, either jump or let's go. Okay, let's make a decision here. So finally she says, Daddy, I want you to swim out there.

And I want to jump and you grab me as soon as I hit the water. And I said, okay, I'll do it. I swim over there. I'm like, okay, sweetie, I'm right here. I'm going to catch you. You just jump off and Daddy has you.

Daddy's not going to let anything happen to you. All right, here we go. One, two, three. She doesn't jump. And I could ask her, I say, Charlotte, do you believe that I'm going to catch you?

[26 : 16] Yes. Do you think that Daddy would ever let anything bad happen to you? She goes, of course not. Well, then jump. Then just jump.

And so she finally did jump and she got water in her ears and cried for the rest of the night. It was horrible. But she did finally jump. She did finally make that. She did finally believe that Daddy was going to be there and catch her in this.

You see, true faith is giving your life to Jesus. It's more than walking an aisle and praying a prayer. You can force anyone to do that. It's more than knowing the right answers.

Even the demons know the right answers. And they are not believers. That is just dead faith. True faith is putting control of your life into God's hands.

Basically, what it all boils down to is this. You can't call yourself a follower of Jesus if you don't follow Jesus anywhere. You can't call yourself a follower of Jesus if you're not following Jesus anywhere.

[27 : 19] That is a dead faith. Robert Plumer, a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he stated how he once heard a pastor describe how he had been saved at a young age but had continued to live a worldly life.

He labeled this experience as coming to know Jesus as Savior. The pastor said that at a later date he had come to know Jesus as Lord. And he spoke of the changes in his life that Jesus had made as Lord, reordering his priorities and calling him to obedience.

This pastor had an apparently sincere desire to call people to discipleship, but he unwittingly was teaching them a false doctrine. He implied that it was possible to have a genuine saving faith and no works or fruit in one's life.

He implicitly encouraged nominal Christians, that is Christians in name only, still under God's wrath to rely on a distant memory of the time they walked an aisle or prayed a prayer followed by years of unrepentant sin and cold hearts.

Now please don't misunderstand me here. Your works never save you. My works will never save me. Even if I could live a perfect life from this point forward, it's not enough.

[28 : 39] Present obedience doesn't make up for past disobedience because present obedience is what is required. You're just doing the bare minimum. Jesus Christ saves us through his perfect life and atoning death.

But he didn't save you from your sin to leave you in your sin. As God's adopted sons and daughters, we experience conviction for sin and loving guidance and discipline of our Heavenly Father.

In his teaching, Jesus left no room for unrepentant faith. There was no such thing as being a saved non-disciple. There's no such thing as calling yourself a follower of Jesus and not following him. Rather, Jesus said in Matthew 16, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. And so as we close right here, there are two very real dangers to our understanding of the gospel that we've dealt with today.

[29 : 44] One is that you can somehow save yourself by your works. Let me tell you, there's nothing you can do to save yourself. And the other danger is that as long as you believe the right theology, then you will be saved.

And you can go live however you want to live. As long as you get the right answers, then you're good. I hope and pray that we've been able to clearly see, as many have put it, faith alone saves. But a faith that saves is never alone. It is always accompanied by living deeds. And so as we think about this, maybe you're here for the first time.

Maybe you've never been in church your entire life and you're here. Or maybe you've been in church your whole life. And now you're starting to see what it means to be a follower of Jesus. If that is a question, are you a follower of Jesus? If that is a question that you're struggling to answer today, then I encourage you, when we stand here in just a moment and sing, I encourage you to come forward.

[30 : 49] That's a question I would love to talk with you about. That's a question that I would love for you to get to the bottom of before you leave today. Maybe you are here and you have been coming for quite some time and you're ready to make this church your church home.

Well, then this is a time that you can respond that way as well. And we would love to talk with you about that. But I do encourage you, however God is leading you this morning, won't you respond in a way that is obedient to what he has called you to do?

Father, thank you so very much for all that you do for us each and every day. God, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the difference that it can make in our lives.

And Lord, I pray that there's someone here today that maybe is hearing this gospel message for the first time or maybe for the thousandth time, but it's just making sense today.

Lord, I pray that you would give them the boldness and obedience to step forward and say, I'm ready to follow Jesus. I'm ready to be a disciple. I'm ready to follow you wherever you lead.

[31 : 50] And Lord, I just thank you so much for your word, for what it teaches us about you, for what it calls us to do, for how it shapes and molds our minds to understand you in a greater way.

So thank you for all that you do. We ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen.