

James chapter 2:14-26 will serve as text. *(James 2:14-26) What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? {15} If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, {16} And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? {17} Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. {18} Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. {19} Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. {20} But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? {21} Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? {22} Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? {23} And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. {24} Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. {25} Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? {26} For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

This text addresses a timeless religious debate which is, “*How much of my work is necessary for my salvation.*” What do I have to do, if anything to be saved? Do I have to repent, be baptized, attend church services, pray, give of my means, etc. Do I have to work for the Lord to continue in salvation or do all I have to do is believe? Well, that debate has been around for hundreds of years. The reason this has always been debated is because of the tendency of man to try to receive all that he can for doing as little as possible.

Well in this text, it’s almost like someone has approached James and asked how little a person has to do to be a Christian. So James in essence says, “You don’t understand faith do you?” There are some in our religious community that embrace the idea that that’s all you have to do to be saved is give mental consent to the existence of Jesus and his deity. All the other things you do are because you are saved. This makes it important for us to study this text as this text teaches against that. I’ve been told that this text disturbed Martin Luther so much that he tore it out of his Bible

because he was a proponent to the idea of “faith only.” Then James comes in here and says, you don’t understand. Workless faith is a “dead faith” to which Martin Luther says, “This is an epistle of straw.”

Let me suggest to you three points. The **FIRST** is that we see from our text the uselessness of WORKLESS FAITH. Under this category, consider that workless faith renders confession insignificant. James says in **{14} *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*** That’s a rhetorical question, which means the answer is obviously no. But notice this man says that he has faith. His confessed faith meant very little. James also challenges us down in verse 19 where he says even demons believed. Even devils knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, and the Son of God and there is support for that found in the gospels.

For instance, over in (Mark 3:11) we have Jesus healing the affliction of many of the people and he cast out demons and we are then told, ***Mark 3:11 And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.*** The demons knew that in their minds, but they did not live by that belief. Now we need to understand that they were correct in the assessment because Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. But that awareness did not make them righteous; mental consent to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah does not save a person. Workless faith renders confession insignificance.

#2. Workless faith renders a faith that is “ineffective.” James in our text asked toward the end of verse 16 of what use is this service that these people wanted to practice. He said what doth it profit? ***{15} If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, {16} And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?***

This kind of faith renders service ineffective because the ones that need help are not helped. In verses 15 and 16, a very graphic scene is presented. He says here is a man that claims to be a Christian by giving a mental consent to faith in Jesus and he comes upon a brother or sister who is without clothing and in need of daily food. So this man of faith and no works says to this brother or sister “depart *in peace, be ye warmed and filled.*” What good did that kind of faith accomplish? “*He said notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*” I think we all can see what James is talking about.

Not only does a workless faith not benefit anyone else, it does not even help you. In verse 14 the question is asked “*can faith save him?*” That is to say, can that simple mental faith in Jesus Christ save you? And the answer given by James is “NO.” ***James 2:24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*** Did you know that this is the only place in the Bible where the expression “faith only” is used and in this passage it is clearly stated that faith only is not able to save any body.

Yet, some people say that a man is saved by faith alone. All that a person has to do is to invite Jesus into your heart and accept him as your personal Savior and you are saved. They use some passage like Eph 2:8-9 that speaks of being saved by grace. I am in no way disputing the importance of grace. But you need to understand that grace alone will not save a person either. James very clearly says that a person is NOT SAVED BY FAITH ONLY. The scripture is in concert with that. Jesus said in (*John 3:36*) ***He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*** The second “believeth” is a different Greek word than the first. It carries the idea of obedience. The NAS uses the word “obey” for believeth and that’s the idea – obedient faith. In 2 Thessalonians 1 the apostle Paul is talking about the return of Jesus in his glory and with his angels. At that return he is going to deal retribution (*2 Th 1:8*) ***In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:***

In Hebrew 5:9 it is written ***And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him***; Now in light of those verses, and others could be cited, does that sound like all a person had to do for salvation is simply acknowledge a faith that you believe that Jesus exist. No; it speaks of obedience which implies doing something in addition to a mental exercise.

A third point is that workless faith renders belief incomplete. ***{22} Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*** In this passage, faith and works travel side-by-side; they are working together. It’s sorta like your legs with one being “faith” and the other being “works.” They both have to work in harmony for you to get to your destination. Sometimes faith steps forward and other times its works. And it is in this fashion that our faith is completed and brought to maturity. That’s what is meant in v. 22 where it says by works was faith made perfect. If

you have immature faith, it may be because you have not worked as God would have you to do. Your trust and belief in Jesus becomes stronger in your obedience.

James then presents two examples of working faith. First he mentions in verse 23 Abraham. In Genesis 22 we read of a time when God tested Abraham's faith by giving him the command to go and sacrifice his only son Isaac. He was to offer that boy as a burnt offering. We read there how that Abraham did exactly what God commanded him to do. He went upon the mountain, he prepared the altar and then he put his son upon that altar. As he lifted the knife to kill his only son, the Lord stopped him. He was faithful to God by obedience. So James states ***{23} And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*** It wasn't until after Abraham obeyed that he was called the friend of God.

Next we have Rahab mentioned in verse 25. You might recall Rahab lived in the city of Jericho and she received some of the spies sent by Moses to check out the land of Canaan. She hid these spies from the king's army who was looking for them. She could have turned over these spies, but she didn't. She hid them and when the coast was clear, she sent them out by another way. The principle is this, Abraham offered and Rahab received and both of these were by faith.

The last verse of the chapter, verse 26 then gives us the conclusion. ***{26} For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*** The principle thing that characterizes death is that there is no activity. So it is with a dead faith. There is no activity. Faith will always do what God commands it to do.

In becoming a Christian, one must have this mental faith. By that I mean he must believe that Jesus is God's son. Then, the Lord expects a person to turn from their sins. Faith does it in obedience. Jesus also says that he wants that person to acknowledge their faith. He wants you to confess your belief in him as God's son and faith does that too. Jesus made a way for us to get rid of our sins. He teaches us that sins are washed away by baptism. That's what Saul of Tarsus was told to do in Acts 16:22. So Jesus says you need to be immersed into his name for the remission of your sins, and faith does it.

Now there are some who stand back and say, "Now I really don't believe that's necessary. I think all I have to do is to give mental consent to the existence of Jesus." That's why often you hear people say things like, "I believe now

and I am saved.” Or you hear a preacher tell his audience to repeat this prayer and you will be saved and the he says something along the line of “*Lord Jesus, I accept you as my personal savior and invite you into my heart.*” Faith without works is dead.

Understand also that this principle is not just about becoming a Christian. In fact, back up in verse 14 he says ***what doth it profit, my brethren.*** If we have been immersed into Christ and been added to his church, let us not stand back and be sorta proud of ourselves and say these passages are good for those who have never been baptized to hear but these verses don’t really apply to me. Well, that’s not the case. This text was addressed to brethren. It’s the brethren that should have working, obedient faith.

Understand too that we are not talking about “earning your salvation.” I think we all agree that you can not earn your salvation. Salvation is a gift of God’s grace. We are talking about letting you faith lead you to obey the commandments given within the pages of scripture. Obedience is necessary in becoming a Christian as well as after one is a Christian. Sometimes it seems we get the idea that all we need to do is regularly attend church services and just sort of coast along and do as little as we can and everything will be all right and we will be a friend of Jesus. Well, that’s not quiet the picture presented here. We’ve been talking about a working faith. I don’t think you would do scripture any injustice if you substituted the term obedience for work, because that is really what James is talking about.

Invitation. Do you need to obey the gospel? If you are not a Christian, we invite you to become one. If you have strayed from the Christian walk, we invite you to come back home to you spot of faithfulness. We invite you to come as we stand and sing.