

Faith Without Works is Useless

An Expository “Journey” Through the **Epistle of James**

12- The Test of True Faith- Part 2

Church June 6, 2021

James 2:14-26

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,
16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

18 But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.

24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

To the Glory of God

Now last week, I told you how the word, “*Evangelical*” came into being. And part of what it means to be an “*Evangelical*” is that we believe what **2 Timothy 3:16** says about the 66 Books of the Holy Bible. That they are fully “inspired” by God (*theopneustos*). They are “*God-breathed*” or even more literal- the Scriptures are “*God-exhaled*”.

So, the Bible is the very Word of God- *written*. And by extension- Evangelicals also believe and teach that every Word of every Verse of every Chapter of every Book of the Bible is:

- Inerrant (*Does not* contain Error)
- Infallible (*Cannot* contain Error)
- Relevant (*Applicable* to 21st Century Believers)
- Sufficient (All we need for a “life of godliness”)

... which is another way of saying that we believe and teach that the Bible is true and coherent.

So, the Word of God does NOT teach us things that are false. And that includes the **Genesis** Account of Creation. And we also believe that the Bible does NOT contradict itself. And that means that James and Paul are NOT teaching two different ways to be justified.

Now we don't believe this because we are smart people- but simply because Jesus Christ has made Himself real to us. And *by, through, and in* the Bible- we have seen for ourselves that Jesus is the trustworthy Son of God. And so, for example, Jesus has taught us that the Scriptures cannot be broken (**John 10:35**). He commissioned Apostles to teach the Church and promised to lead them into all Truth (**John 16:13**). Jesus has given us His Spirit to open our eyes to see Reality for what it really is (**1Corinthians 2:14&15**). And so, we have come to receive His Word as the very Word of God (**1Thessalonians 2:13**), free from Error and Contradiction, because God Himself is true and not a God of confusion.

But that doesn't mean that there are no problems for us in the Bible. There are- NOT because there is something wrong with the Bible- but because there is something wrong with us. We are finite. And we are also sinful. And we are culturally biased. And so, Language itself can confuse us when *different* words carry the *same* meaning; or when the *same* words carry *different* meanings.

For example, take the simple English word "*rock*." This word can mean a stone; or a particular kind of music; or something you do in a rocking chair; or a man's nick-name. Or take the Greek word, "*zelos*" which can be translated into English as "*jealousy*" in a bad sense; or "*zeal*" in a good sense. And because that's true- we would need to ask for this word to be defined BEFORE we could answer the Question, "*Don't you think we should strive to overcome all *zelos* in our lives?*"

Or consider the confusion that might arise from a simple statement given by an American, who said to his English friend, "*Let's play football this afternoon.*" Because, an Englishman just might respond, "*Sounds great, I'll play the goalie.*" Now the American might give his friend a puzzled look because even though there

aren't any "goalies" in our game of football- this word "*football*" means "*soccer*" to someone born across the pond.

Now beside the indisputable fact that no red-blooded American man would ever be caught dead playing soccer instead of American football- I hope you can see that there are times when the very SAME words can have vastly DIFFERENT meanings- depending on the Culture in which they are used and even the position they hold in a sentence. And to add insult to injury- there are times when DIFFERENT words can have the very SAME meanings.

And this is true in every language on earth- even the so-called, "dead languages"- like Latin and Aramaic.¹ And that tells us that we will struggle with these same problems when we try to understand the Bible. America's greatest Theologian, Jonathan Edwards, came to the end of one of his journal entries- arguing (with himself) that the phrase "Moral Duty" was a redundancy, since "*every Duty whatsoever is a 'moral' Duty.*" And in his frustration- Edwards wrote this down as a "sigh of resignation" to the world of words:

"O, how is the world darkened, clouded, distracted, and torn to pieces by those dreadful enemies of mankind called words!"

Now, of course, Edwards' Statement is hyperbole- because he greatly valued the sacred Words of the Bible. And so, even though, many times, words can be maddening- they are also a precious means of communicating. I have marveled many times, how God used very *common* and *ordinary* people like Paul and Peter and James and John to carry out *extra-ordinary* tasks- like writing down infallible Truth. But I have also marveled how God used very *common* and *ordinary* language tools like nouns and verbs and adverbs and adjectives and pronouns- to convey eternal and absolute Concepts to us.

So, I really do feel like Edwards sometimes when I'm trying to solve "language difficulties" in the Bible. The Inspiration of the Word of God is like the Incarnation of the Son of God. Everybody says they believe in it- but it's hard to describe. So, when the invincible, immortal Son of God became a human being- He became vulnerable to things that ALL humans are vulnerable to: like hunger and weariness and abuse and even death. And the Word of God is similar in that when the Word of God became human language- it became vulnerable to things that ALL languages suffer: like difficulties and ambiguity and misunderstanding.

Now I said all of that to say this: Last week I made the case from **Romans 4:1-5** that lost sinners are forgiven and made Righteous (Justified) by Faith ALONE- and NOT by Works. And when I say, "not by Works" I mean not by

¹ Jesus spoke ONLY in Aramaic. All English quotes attributed to Jesus in the Bible have been translated from the Aramaic that He spoke to the Greek in which they were originally written in Scripture- to the Latin and, finally, to the English.

ANY Works- not even good, *religious* Works (like partaking of the Sacraments). And I told you that this one Issue is the very HEART of the Biblical Gospel. It is the CORE of true Christianity. In other words, if you *deny, change, or even minimize* Justification by Faith ALONE (Latin: *Sola Fide*) you have created an entirely *different* religion that is fundamentally *distinct* from Christianity.

And this is so true that the Issue of “*Sola Fide*” (Justification by Faith alone) was the “*Material Cause*” of the Protestant Reformation. Now for those of us, who went to public School- when I say that “*Sola Fide*” was the “*Material Cause*” of the Protestant Reformation”- that means that it was one of two MAIN REASONS why the Protestant Reformation happened; and the Cause as to *why* we are not all Romans today.² The Roman religious system has created their own, Man-made system of Teachings that are *fundamentally* at odds with what the Holy Scriptures teach about two main Issues:

1. How lost people are forgiven and made Righteous
2. Who (or what) has “final Authority” to “bind the conscience” and determine “Right from Wrong”

... and one of the best “Summary Statements” that best illustrate “*Sola Fide*” is found in **Romans 3:28** that says,

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

And the entire Doctrine of “Lost sinners being made Righteous by Faith and NOT by Works” (Justification by Faith ALONE) was spelled out in crystal clear fashion by the Apostle Paul in **Romans 4:1-5:2**. And that Passage tells us that Justification comprises two different Parts:

1. God's sovereign Declaration over the sinner as being “*Not Guilty*” (Forgiveness)
2. The sovereign Imputation of the spotless Righteousness of Jesus to the sinner- by Faith ALONE and NOT by Works (Made/Declared Righteous)

So, the Issue before us today is this: “*Does James contradict “Sola Fide”*”? Does James *contradict* the Truth that lost people are forgiven and made Righteous by Faith alone? Now why do I ask that Question? Because this is what James wrote in **James 2:24**:

² The other Issue (the Formal Cause) was, “Who has the Authority to ‘bind the conscience’ and determine ‘right from Wrong’”. The Reformers taught that Scripture ALONE (*Sola Scriptura*) has that Authority; while Rome teaches that the pope has that authority (papal infallibility).

You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone

... and that seems to be a *direct* Contradiction to what the Apostle Paul said in **Romans 3:28**:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law

So, which one is telling the Truth- Paul or James? Does the fact that James was the half-brother of Jesus cause what he says to be of greater Value than anything that came out of Paul's mouth? Or does the fact that Paul was caught up into the 3rd Heaven (**2Corinthians 12:2**) give his writings greater credibility? Is Justification by Faith ALONE- completely apart from ANY and ALL Works- including *religious* Works; or is Justification the result of partaking of good and godly and noble Works? Which one is it? Who was telling and the Truth and who was a deceiver?

James 2:21-24 not only teaches that a person is justified by Works- it goes on further to deny that Justification is by Faith alone. At least that what it *appears* to teach. So, let me ask a Question. "*Why would anyone think that James was teaching against 'Sola Fide' here?*" There is only one reason: James uses the word, "Justified" in that Passage. Let's look at verses 21&24 again:

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Now if all James said was verses 21 and 24- then it would be a slam dunk. We would then be *forced* to conclude that James was indeed contradicting Paul. And Honesty would *force* us to then agree with the skeptics that the Bible absolute DOES have contradictions in it. And that would then *force* us to say that the Bible could NOT possible be the infallible Word of the living God- because one part categorically *disagrees* with another part.

So, I hope you can see what all is riding on this Issue. Not only does the **Epistle of James** *seem* to bring "*Sola Fide*" (Justification by Faith Alone) into doubt- but by James *seemingly* contradicting what is clearly taught in **Romans**- the first Pastor of the Church at Jerusalem is also attacking the Premise that the 66 Books of the Holy Bible is fully inspired and is true in both part and in whole.

Now we are not the only people who have noticed this problem. This Passage here in **James 2** is *routinely* used by those deceived by the "Roman

religious system” to refute “*Sola Fide*” in particular and the entire Protestant Reformation as a whole. In fact, Roman religious leaders call “*Sola Fide*” a “legal fiction”.

Now stop and think about this for a moment. The Deception of Rome is so deep and so wide and so pervasive that those who have fallen into its web of lies believe and teach that the Biblical Gospel; “*Sola Fide*”; Justification by Faith alone; the correct understanding of **Romans 4**; the very “heart and soul” of Christianity is a “legal fiction”!

But to add insult to injury- Rome uses this very Passage from **James 2** as their “proof text” to make their Argument. And that is *why* I have spent so much time on this Issue. Every believer in this building needs to know whether or not James and Paul were at odds with one another over how lost sinners are forgiven and made Righteous. And you need to know if the Bible has contradictions in it. And you need to know if “*Sola Fide*” matters or if it is simply a silly exercise for theologians and people with too much money and too much spare time on their hands.

Now I just told you that if all James wrote was verses 21&24- the Argument would be over; and we would have lost. Rome would be correct; and every single Protestant should *immediately* repent and *reconvert* back into Catholicism. And every single Protestant church around the entire world should immediately disband and put the banner of Rome over their buildings.

But James didn’t just write verses 21&24. He also wrote verses 22&23 that says,

22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.

... and here, James CONFIRMS what Paul wrote in **Romans 4**. And in verse 23- James quotes from **Genesis 15:6** and says:

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS

... which is the very SAME quote that Paul used in **Romans 4:3**.

But what is it that was “reckoned” or “credited” to Abraham as Righteousness? Abraham’s Faith. NOT his Works; NOT what Abraham DID- but his BELIEF and TRUST in what God had said. God had sovereignly given

Abraham the Ability and the Desire to put his Hope and his Trust and his Confidence and his Faith and his Belief in Who God is; and what God had said; and in what God alone had done. And even though God is the One Who gave Abraham that Ability and Power- He nevertheless “reckoned”; He “credited”; He “considered” Abraham’s Faith in God- as being Righteousness.

In other words, because Abraham believed- God *justified* him. Now what does that mean? It means that God “considered” or “reckoned” Abraham to have NEVER sinned! (Forgiveness). And because Abraham believed- God “considered” or “reckoned” Abraham to have ALWAYS obeyed every single Command of God- in thought, word, and deed- PERFECTLY and CONTINUALLY! (Righteousness).

And this means that God considered Abraham to be *just as Righteous as God Himself is Righteous!* Why? Because Abraham believed. And that is the Doctrine of “Justification by Faith alone” (*Sola Fide*)!

Now who wrote verses 22&23? Paul? No, James! Now it is true that Paul wrote it too (**Romans**). But so did John; and Peter; and Moses; and every other Biblical writer. But here, James wrote it. And that means that James believed it. And that means that James was NOT contradicting Paul- at all. And that also means that the Bible does NOT contain any Contradictions. But that also means that Rome is categorically wrong about how lost sinners are forgiven and made Righteous- which means that the Protestant Reformation was right!

Now let’s go further to see- from the Scriptures- that not only do Paul and James agree; not only is “*Sola Fide*” the true Gospel; not only is Rome teaching a false and Man-made “gospel”; but what James says here actually corrects a *false* understanding and a misconception about what Paul was teaching in **Romans**. In other words, not only do James and Paul agree with each other- but James goes to great lengths to correct a perversion of what Paul taught.

Now some would say, “*Wait a minute, Brother Blair. James wrote this Epistle first (44-49AD). And then Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans. (56AD)*” That’s true. But we need to remember that Paul was preaching and teaching “Justification by Faith alone” for many years BEFORE he wrote his masterpiece of **Romans**. And, according to **Galatians 1:19**, James was one of the very first Christians Paul spoke with.

Now last week, I told you that Paul was very aware that his Teaching of “*Sola Fide*” (Justification by Faith alone) was being *distorted* and *misused* by certain heretics, who had been deceived by the false Teaching called, “*Antinomianism*” or “*Lawlessness*”. And “*Lawlessness*” abuses the precious Grace of God by saying,

“Since lost sinners are forgiven and made Righteous by Faith alone- absent any and all Works- let’s not do ANY Good Works AT ALL- so that God will continued to be honored by our Faith; and we can continue to be declared Righteous”

And I pray you can see that it isn’t long until those deceived by this Heresy will descend into the worst kind of behavior imaginable. History reveals that horrific Acts of brutality along with pervasive sexual Immorality ALWAYS typified those who had fallen into this Deception. Even in our day- you can always tell when someone has been deceived by “Lawlessness”: They ALWAYS talk about how MUCH Sin they can engage in and still go to Heaven- rather than discuss how many godly and righteous and holy Acts they can engage in- to God’s Glory.

But the Apostle Paul addressed this Deception in great detail in **Romans 6:1&2-** when he said,

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

... and as you go through the rest of **Romans** along with the other Epistles- you realize that Faith and Works are NOT enemies. They each have their place in the overall “Process” of Salvation.³ Works DO NOT *produce* Salvation. And they DON’T because they CAN’T.

So, no matter how sincere we might be; no matter how honest and earnest we are- what we “do” (our Works) is NEVER Perfect. Our Works are NEVER sinless. *Everything* we do; Every single effort we make to obey God- has flaws and weaknesses and imperfections woven all through them. So, if Salvation was produced through our Works- NOBODY would be saved.

And yet we are COMMANDED to engage in Good and Noble and Honorable Works- after we have been justified. So, how do Faith and Works fit together? We are forgiven and we are “reckoned” or ‘counted” or “considered” or “made” Righteous by Faith- ALONE- absent ANY and ALL Works.

And bearing or producing or manifesting these Good Works; or this godly Fruit; or this spiritual Evidence; or these Acts of Righteousness- is basically *automatic- once we have experienced Justification*. It is the normal and natural *response* to already being justified. It is what justified people do. It is part and parcel to what

³ Salvation is a “Process” in that it begins in “Eternity Past” with the “Decree of God” and ends in “Eternity Future” with the glorification of the physical bodies of the Redeemed in Heaven. Each “Step” in the Salvation Process is explained in the current (2021) Bible Study on the “Ordo Salutis” (the Order of Salvation).

being justified means.

And that tells us that Good Deeds or Good Works is the human *response* to already being Justified. So, us performing or doing Good Deeds is NOT the *Cause* of our Justification- but the *Result*. So, Good Deeds are NOT the “*Root*” of Justification- but the *Fruit* of already experiencing the Act of being forgiven and being reckoned as Righteous.

And that is what James meant when he said in verse 22,

You see that faith was working with his [Abraham’s] works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

So, James is teaching that the Saving Faith that God gave to Abraham that justified him was “**perfected**”- in other words, it was “finished” or “made complete”- by Abraham doing the Good Deed of obeying God and offering up Isaac on the altar.

So, Abraham was “proving” that he had already been justified because he was able to respond to the Gift of Saving Faith- by engaging in the Good Work of believing that God would provide a Lamb for Himself- so he would NOT have to kill his son.

Another way of looking at this is to say that Abram’s Justification was “made complete” or “proven” by the fact that he could do the spiritual kind of Good Works- of believing that God would provide for Himself a Lamb- so he WOULDN’T have to kill his own son.

Now another reason to believe what I just said- is that the English word, “Justified” came from a Greek word- that has TWO DIFFERENT MEANINGS. One meaning has to do with: *being acquitted*. And that is the kind of Justification that Paul taught in **Romans**. But the other word has to do with: “*vindication*” or “*proof*”- and was used, for example, in **Romans 3:4** that says,

May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

... where Justified as used here has NOTHING to do with being forgiven and made Righteous. Another time this SAME Greek word was used like this is in

1Timothy 3:16 where Paul wrote,

By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

... where this SAME Greek word was translated here as “*Vindicated*”- because Jesus had NO NEED to be forgiven and made Righteous. And I suggest that in **James 2:21**- the half-brother of Jesus was using this Greek word to mean: “*Vindicated*” rather than “*forgiven and made Righteous*”. So, verse 21 would read:

Was not Abraham our father [vindicated] by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

In other words- the Good Works that Abram engaged in- PROVED that he had already been Justified by Faith ALONE. Or, the fact that Abram was seeking to trust that God would provide for Himself a Lamb- VINDICATED the Reality that he had ALREADY been justified by Faith ALONE- and NOT by Works.

Now remember the Doctrine of “Justification by Faith Alone” (*Sola Fide*) was as radical and as amazing and as hard to grasp 2,000 years ago as it is today. And there were at least a hundred different ways this wondrous Biblical Truth was distorted and misused back then as there are today. So, this Truth is sort of like the Doctrine of the Trinity- everybody says they believe in it- but it’s hard to explain. In fact, it is much EASIER to get this Doctrine *wrong* than it is to get it *right*. I would suppose that MOST people in the modern church- who are genuinely saved- have a hard time explaining this Truth.

So, when Paul wrote **Romans 5:20** that says,

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

... people said, “*Great! Christianity teaches that Grace abounds MORE When Sin increases. So, let’s go sin MORE- so that Grace can abound MORE!*”

Now Paul repeatedly answered that kind of superficial distortion and abuse of his Teaching. And in virtually all his Epistles- the Apostle clearly taught how Good Works and genuine Love *necessarily* flow out from real, justifying Faith. For example, in **Galatians 5:13**- he wrote,

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Now today, it is common to see people dancing all over the church and waving flags- singing about the “Freedom” and the “Liberty” that Jesus brought to His people. But when you actually begin to question just what that “Freedom” is- everybody gets real quiet.

The “Freedom” that the New Testament talks about- is NOT the “Freedom” to do whatever you want to. It is NOT a “Freedom” from Rules and

Commandments. It is NOT the Liberty to act out whatever feeling or inclination a person has- and then try to sanctify it by saying the Spirit led you.

No, this is about a “Freedom” FROM Sin and a “Liberty” to follow Jesus- in humble and joyful Obedience. This is about the “Freedom” to leave the slavery of Sin and begin a life as a “bond-slave” of Jesus- Who bought and paid for you. It is the “Freedom” away from being cruelly driven by your carnal lusts to being led by God’s Spirit into a holy life of submission to the Authority of Scripture. And that is why Paul said,

... do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh ...

... but now look carefully at the next phrase,

... but through love serve one another

So, is Paul teaching here that we can just lay the “Works of Love” or those “Good Deeds” on top of this “Freedom” as though it was some layer of “legal Duty”? Is Paul saying, “*Well, you people got a real good start through Justification by Faith alone, but now there is another way, besides Faith, to do what you ought to do and become a loving person?*” No, he isn’t.

Look carefully at **Galatians 5:6**- which is a crucial verse that shows the amazing Harmony that Paul and James had with each other about “*Sola Fide*”.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

When Paul dealt with the *abuses* of his Teaching on the Doctrine of “Justification by Faith alone” (*Sola Fide*), he did NOT attack Grace- like so many do in our day. And that is because there is NOTHING wrong with Grace. Grace is NEVER a problem, dear friends. And the notion that, because people *abuse* Grace- we need then to stop teaching about it; or (even worse) stop demonstrating it or rejoicing over it- or that we should start looking at God’s Grace as a problem that we need to overcome; or that Grace is something that leads people into Lawlessness. None of that is true. But that is *exactly* what satan wants. Because this mentality ALWAYS leads people into “*Legalism*”- which is *just as* wrong; *just as* evil; and *just as* dishonoring to God as is “*Lawlessness*”.

We need to know that jumping from Lawlessness into Legalism has NOT fixed the problem. All you’ve done is go from one evil Heresy to another one- that is just as damning. No, the Answer to the “loose living” of Lawlessness- is the

SAME Answer to the “impossible standards” of Legalism: we must run into the Arms of God’s Grace.

So how did Paul defeat those who abused or misused his Teaching of Justification by Faith alone? He taught that the Good Works we do- AFTER we have already been justified- is NOT like the Circumcision that the Jews did under the Old Covenant. Why? Because the Good Works we do- that are born by already being justified- are NOT about gaining Favor with God. So, what are these Good Works? Paul said the Good Works we do after we have already been justified is,

... faith working through love

Now notice very carefully what he said here. What is it that counts with God? Faith? No! Be careful. Paul did NOT say plain, ordinary, naked Faith. He taught about a very particular KIND of Faith:

... faith working through love

... so, Paul did NOT teach that what counts with God is just "Faith". He also did NOT teach that what counts with God is “Faith” plus a layer of loving Works added to our Faith. That is NOT what he taught. He says that what counts with God is the KIND of Faith that- by its nature- produces Love. And it is THIS Faith that gives us our right standing with God. And the Love that comes from this Faith *proves* that the Faith we have- is in fact, *real, living, justifying* Faith.

And this is what James was trying to get across in his Epistle. James was NOT attacking Paul. And James was also NOT contradicting “*Sola Fide*”. James believed in and taught “Justification by Faith alone”- as much or more than Paul did. James was simply attacking the *distortions* and *misuses* of Paul’s Teaching.

So, what we need to remember is that “loveless Faith” is absolutely useless. And Good Deeds born out of a sense of Obligation or Duty is equally worthless. And so, anybody who thinks or who believes or who teaches that, “*We are justified by Faith alone, and so it doesn’t matter whether we are a loving person*” or “*We are justified by Faith alone- and so it doesn’t matter if we do anything after we are justified*” is deceived and doesn’t understand the Truth about “*Sola Fide*”.

So, let's see how James corrects this distortion of Paul's Teaching. Here's where you have to watch out for the words James uses. We have to figure out what James meant by the words he used- *especially* when his words seem to be in conflict with Paul.

James' concern is with a kind of “*counterfeit faith*” that sounds great- but which does not produce Love. And that kind of faith CAN’T

justify anybody. **James 2:14:**

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

.. and the Answer is, “*No!*” That kind of faith CAN’T save anybody. Yet it is called, “faith”. So, what kind of Works is James interested in? The same kind Paul wanted- the “Works of Love”.

**15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,
16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?**

Now this is NOT about being practical or “down-to-earth”. James was NOT promoting the “social gospel” nor was he teaching that by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and housing the homeless- that we have carried out the command to preach the Gospel. James is simply talking about Works of Love. And James' concern is that people have real, “Saving Faith” and not “counterfeit faith”. And the difference is that the real, “Saving Faith” produces loving Behavior.

And he gave us three descriptions of this “counterfeit faith”. First in verse 17, he says it is, “dead”:

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

... so, “counterfeit faith” is “dead faith”. So, if whatever Faith you have- does not "work through love" as Paul said- it is counterfeit and it is dead. Second, in verse 19 he says,

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

... and this means that there is a KIND of faith that even unsaved fallen angels have- which is a firm and correct belief in biblical Truth. But the Faith that “justifies”- the Faith that “works through Love”- is NOT merely agreement with biblical Truth like, "**God is one.**" Because even fallen demons can be very Orthodox on an intellectual level. The Bible teaches that demons believe. Yet their faith doesn't save them. So, there is “dead faith” and then there is “demon faith”. Third, he says in verse 20,

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

... so, this is useless, idle, ineffective, vain, and empty faith. Yet the Bible calls it, “faith”.

So, there are three different KINDS of faith in this Passage that James talks about that CANNOT justify:

1. Dead Faith
2. Demon Faith
3. Useless Faith

So, how does James then go about to make his case from the life of Abraham - which was what Paul did in **Romans 4**? Well, he does it like this. He takes two events in the life of Abraham. The first (in **James 2:22**) is from **Genesis 15:6**. God promises Abraham a great host of descendants- even though his wife is barren. And verse 23 cites Abraham's faith from **Genesis 15:6**,

AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS

... and that is *exactly* what Paul did with that same Event and that same verse in **Romans 4:3**. So, one thing is “reckoned” as Righteousness: Faith. Abraham believed God and his Belief was reckoned as Righteousness. So, Faith, not Works, was reckoned as Righteousness.

But then James notices that in **Genesis 22:1-**

"God tested Abraham"

... by commanding him to offer up his son Isaac. So, what was God testing? He was testing Abraham’s Faith. But what was God looking for? He was looking for the kind of Obedience or Works that shows Abraham's Faith was not “dead faith” or “demon faith” or “useless faith”. So, the Issue in **James 2:21** (where Abraham offers Isaac) is NOT the first Act of Justification that put Abraham in a right standing with God. The Issue with Abraham in **Genesis 22** is the Test:

Was Abraham's Faith the living kind of Faith that “vindicates” (justifies/proves) the *legitimacy* of Abraham’s Faith by producing in Abraham an "Obedience” based in Love rather than the “dead, demon, or useless faith” that has no godly result?

So, when James says in verse 21 that Abraham was "justified by works" he has a meaning in mind DIFFERENT from Paul's when Paul denies that a man is justified by Works (**Romans 3:28; 4:2; 4:5**). James is answering the Question: "*Does the ongoing and final reckoning of Abraham's Righteousness depend on Works as the necessary Evidence of true and living Faith?*" And James' Answer to that Question is, "*Yes! Absolutely!*"

But Paul's Answer is also, "*Yes! Absolutely!*" Because in **Galatians 5:6**- the only thing that counts is "**faith working through love**". So, if you asked James or Paul, "*How does an ungodly person get right with God and receive the righteousness of God in Christ as a gift?*" BOTH of them would answer with the words of **James 2:23** "Trust God (trust Christ) and that Faith alone will be reckoned as Righteousness."

... and most people stop there.

But if you then pressed on and ask them, "*Does Justification- as an ongoing and final right standing with God- DEPEND on the Works of Love?*" Paul is going to say, "*No!*" If by, "*Works*" you mean Deeds done to show that you DESERVE God's ongoing Blessing (the point of **Romans 4:4**). But James is going to say, "*Yes!*" If by, "*Works*" you mean the Fruit and Evidence of your Faith like Abraham's loving Obedience on Mount Moriah.

But then Paul would be quick to add, "*You need to know that I agree with James, based on his definitions.*" And James would add, "*You need to know that I agree with Paul, based on his definitions.*"

So, when Paul renounces "Justification by Works" he renounces the view that anything we do along with Faith is credited to us as Righteousness. Only Faith obtains the Verdict of, "*Not Guilty*", when we become Christians. Works of any kind are NOT acceptable in the moment of initial Justification.

But when James affirms "Justification by Works" he means that Loving Works are absolutely *necessary* in the ongoing Life of a Christian to *confirm* or *vindicate* or *prove* the Reality of the Faith that justifies.

For Paul, "Justification by Works" (which he and James rejected) means: "Gaining right standing with God by the merit of our Works." But for James, "Justification by Works" (which both he and Paul accepted) means: "Maintaining a right standing with God by Faith along with the necessary Evidence of Faith, namely, the Works of Love."

To say this another way: When Paul teaches in **Romans 4:5** that lost sinners are justified "by Faith alone", he means that the only thing that unites us to Christ for Righteousness is dependence on Christ. But when James says in **James 2:24**

that we are NOT justified by Faith alone- he means that the Faith alone which justifies- does not *remain* alone.

And so, it is important for us to understand that these two Positions are NOT contradictory. Faith alone unites us to Christ for Righteousness- PERIOD. But the Faith that unites us to Christ for Righteousness does not *remain* alone. It goes on to bear the Fruit of Love. And this Faith MUST do so- or it is either dead, demon, or useless faith and it CANNOT justify.

And this SAME Logic should be applied to James' final example- Rahab the Gentile Prostitute in **James 2:25**:

In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

So, what was the “Good Work” that Rahab engaged in here? Lying? Deceiving those around her? No, the “Good Work” of believing that God had given the Children of Israel the Promised Land- which made it CORRECT for them to take it from those who already lived there- *even by force*.⁴

And her loving response (Works) to the Gift of Faith that God sovereignly gave her- PROVED that God had chosen this Gentile sinner for Salvation. And it also PROVED that He had ALREADY visited her with Saving Faith. And it PROVED that she had ALREADY been Justified- *prior* to this moment. So, her Good Works of believing what Joshua told her- even though she might have been killed over it- VINDICATED/Proved the Reality that this wicked rebel- had ALREADY experienced the Miracle of the New Birth and had been justified. That is what James is teaching.

Now another reason I believe this- is because in **Matthew 1:5**- Rahab is counted as part of Jesus' genealogy.

Finally, in verse 26, James sums up what he has been teaching here by saying,

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Now once again, James is teaching that, “*Talk is cheap*”. *Anybody* can lay claim to be saved. But true Salvation comes ONLY by believing. And because we are all born as fallen sinners- we MUST be given the Gift of Saving Faith- in order

⁴ I realize that this is a “hard sell” to those who already lived there. But we must agree with Scripture that God owns all the land anyway. And so, God sovereignly gave the land to the Jews- even though the Jews were JUST as sinful and JUST as unworthy as the pagans. This “unfairness” about real estate is what Grace is all about- and is a natural example of how God saves unworthy sinners.

to believe. And it is by believing- that we are “made Righteous”- and NOT by striving to obey God. Why? Because all of our effort to obey- will NEVER be without flaw. But then we must also say that correct believing will ALWAYS result in us *responding* to that Saving Faith by engaging in loving Works. And those Works of Love- Vindicates or Proves that the Faith we have- is real.

Dear friends, we need to understand that the Glory of Jesus Christ in the Gospel is NOT seen and it is NOT demonstrated merely because we are justified when we depend entirely on Him. It goes much further than that. Because that “depending entirely on Christ” is the Power that makes us to be a new kind of humble and loving people. Depending entirely on Christ is how we are justified. But it is also how we are sanctified as well. And Paul emphasized the first one- while James majored in the second one. But BOTH are equally important to know because BOTH are true. And TOGETHER- they bring Christ the Glory that is due his Name.

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

