

*Scripture Reading: James 2*

**“14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can [such] faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”**

# Faith & Works in the Christian Life

This morning we will continue to study what the Apostle James teaches about faith and works in the Christian life.

- We noted that James is focused on the practice of right living and not just some theory of salvation.

James asks an important question in verse 14, when he asks if faith without works can save a person.

He lays out his arguments and concerns and concludes with the Biblical answer in verse 26, empty or dead faith without works is... DEAD! We stressed that it was very important to remember when Jesus, Paul or James talk about faith, saving faith, it is clearly:

- NOT some sort of faith we have produced on our own
- NOT some sort of decision we have made
- NOT some sort of human will-power to overcome sin & temptation
- NOT some list of faithful works we do to merit or earn salvation

James clearly teaches that we are saved by no other faith than the gracious saving faith which both Jesus and Paul spoke of:

- Our salvation is the result of our sovereign God graciously giving us new hearts by which we repent and are justified, what Jesus described as the new birth.
- The gracious gift of salvation is the result of God’s love & actions from start to finish!

I covered a few familiar verses last week about such saving faith, but I want to share few more to remind us about the important Biblical balance: Here in James 2, we saw this in verse 2 “ My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”

The word ‘faith’ or variations like ‘faithful’ are used almost four hundred times in the Scriptures, so we should be careful when someone insists that their definition of faith is the only right one!

- We should think about a faithful road, pun intended, that we should travel avoiding two dangerous ditches on either side.

**Saving faith is a gift from God that works itself out in our obedient lives! That is what James is arguing for here and as we shall see in a moment what the reformers argued for as well.**

**On the one side of this Biblical road, we have those who fear that any obedience on our part takes away from God's glory or gift: It is all of God and we are just worms that get to be blessed in the end, but we better not try to do any good works in the here and now.**

**On the other side of the road we have those who insist that IF our faith is not a real choice that we make all on our own then we are just robots with God controlling our lives.**

**When we avoid those ditches, we can find that all of the verses about faith come together in the rich Christian life where the faith of the Lord Jesus that James references becomes our faith or even referenced as my faith! Listen to a few more places where we can see this relationship:**

**Revelation 14: "12 Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."**

**2 Peter 1:1 "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ."**

**1 Peter 1 "6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, & glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love."**

**Hebrews 12: "12 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."**

**And I think it would be good to once again to hear what Luther said about such saving faith in his introduction to the book of Romans: "Oh, it is a living, active, energetic, mighty thing, this faith, so that it is impossible that it should not work what is good without intermission. It does not even ask whether good works are to be done, but before one asks it has done them, and is ever doing. But he who does not do such works is a man without faith..."**

**Now I mentioned last week that speaking of faith and works together is controversial: Some in the reformed world act as if it undermines the great reformational truth of salvation by faith alone. And even in the evangelical world any talk of faithful works is seen as undermining salvation by Grace.**

**So, this morning we will review some questions from the Heidelberg Catechism to put our reformed friends at ease and look carefully at the Biblical examples that James shares to confirm his teaching about faith and works, which may give both sides a lot to think about.**

**Let's begin our review of the Heidelberg Catechism at Question 86 . Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works? Answer . Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ.**

➤ **In a moment we will see this assurance in the examples of Abraham & Rahab.**

**Question 88 . Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?**

**Answer . Of two parts; of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.**

- They are now speaking about how saving faith is worked out in our lives.

**Question 89 . What is the mortification of the old man?**

**Answer . It is a sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins; and more and more to hate and flee from them.**

**Question 90 . What is the quickening of the new man?**

**Answer . It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.**

**Question 91 . But what are good works?**

**Answer . Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.**

- So we see that the reformers had no problem putting faith and works in the same sentence!

**The bottom-line: We are justified by saving faith from the Holy Spirit, which is always and active and obedient faith! James goes on to confirm his teaching with two familiar Old Testament examples:**

- And this is where we can really get into trouble with those who fear to use Biblical language!

**Verses 20-24: “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”**

- The faith of Abraham was an obedient faith & is the example of the saving faith that we need and should demonstrate in our lives

**In Verse 22, James clearly explains that it is God who brings faith to the intended goal of good works when he says that Abraham’s faith was working together with his works, and by works his faith was made perfect.**

- We see in Abraham the works of faith NOT someone who is working to have faith, It is vital that we understand the difference!

**Hebrews 11 gives us many more examples of saving faith: And we should notice that they are all coupled with obedient actions!**

**8: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance**

**20: By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come**

**21: By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph**

**23: By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents**

**24: By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter**

**28: By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood**

**29: By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land**

**30: By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days**

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

- And Rahab is also the final example that James uses in his discussion of saving faith:

Verse 25: “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?”

Were any these Saints perfect? Certainly NOT!

- This is why James introduced this discussion with the command to show mercy and the law of liberty.

After these examples, James answers that question he asked back in verse 14:

Verse 26: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

- Faith without works is dead!

As we have discussed this week and last, today we have many who are not comfortable with his straightforward answer. We must not allow our modern dualisms, rationalisms or pietism to confuse what James says here:

- Absent breath, the body is dead & absent works, your faith is dead.

Now I just used some big words regarding our modern thinking and how do they relate to what James concludes? Just as James showed from the examples of Abraham and Rahab, it is our good works in Christ that give life to our faith which we placed in Christ.

- We must always be those who desire and seek Biblical saving faith, faith that is active & obedient.
- Will we obey perfectly or even always consistently... NO!

In closing I promised we would again look at Paul’s instruction to the Saints at Colossi with a bit more context, and I trust these passages will bring you the type of comfort and encouragement it has given me down through the years. Much like Ephesians, Paul begins with the glory of our salvation in Christ:

Colossians 1:13 “[Jesus] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”  
[salvation, the Good News!]

Paul then answers an important question...

- Who is this Jesus Who has saved us?

15 “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

*[mention Come Bless the Father]*

Then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter Paul, just as James has done, becomes very practical:

Colossians 2: “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, & attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

- This is why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom!

**4** Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. **5** For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. **6** As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, **7** rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. **8** Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. **9** For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; **10** and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

As we ponder just what it means to walk with Jesus in the same way we came to Jesus, we can reflect & meditate on what the Apostle goes on to share in chapter 3 [homework!]

Colossians 3:12 “Therefore...

➤ What is it there for?

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Communion Meditation:

Christ has prepared His feast for us this afternoon :

The example of Abraham and Rahab are used by James and in Hebrews teaching us that the good news of the “new covenant in my blood” really is universal and that God’s gracious gift of faith in Christ can be celebrated at the Table by everyone:

*Male & female*

*Jew & Gentile*

*Rich & Poor*

*Free & slave*

*“righteous” & “sinful”*

*Mature & novice*

*Old & young*