

James 2:14-26 (NKJV)

Jas 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

15-16 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 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.

1

Jas 2:18 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?

2

Jas 2:22 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.

3

James 2:25 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.

4

- As a result of misinterpreting James 2, many religious groups, such as Roman Catholicism and even some Protestant denominations, teach that works are required to be saved in the initial sense (regenerated)
- Other Protestant groups – including many Baptists – while adamantly insisting that initial salvation is by faith alone, interpret this text to mean that if a person claims to be a Christian but doesn't live as a Christian should, then that person was never saved in the first place (Calvinist Perseverance doctrine)

5

- These are both misinterpretations of what James is saying in his epistle
- Martin Luther saw a contradiction between James 2 and Rom. 3-4
- But his contradiction arose out of his own misinterpretation of the book of Romans
- Because of his presuppositions, Martin Luther essentially equated justification with initial salvation – and he arrived at the conclusion that Paul teaches salvation by faith alone

6

- James teaches that justification – being declared righteous by God – is according to works
- Salvation in the initial sense IS by faith alone, when one believes on Jesus for receiving eternal life, but that is NOT what Paul was teaching to the believers at Rome
- Paul was combating the Judaizers, who were out in full force

7

- The Judaizers taught that the way believers are sanctified – set apart unto holiness and righteousness before the Lord – is by keeping the Mosaic law – and that includes the necessity of being circumcised and observing the dietary laws
- Paul's point in Romans is that God considers as justified (righteous) those who are living the Christian life BY FAITH, not by keeping a list of rules, like the Mosaic law

8

- Consistent righteous living is one of the qualifications for kingdom inheritance – thus, the Judgment Seat verdict of “Well done, GOOD and FAITHFUL servant”
- Thus, Paul's argument in Romans is NOT soteriological
- But because Martin Luther assumed that it was, and thought Paul was teaching positional justification, he totally dismissed James' argument of justification by works as contrary to Paul's – that led him to refer to the book of James as a straw epistle

9

- Because of Martin Luther's misunderstanding of Romans, numerous Protestant groups – including Baptists and Bible churches – teach that justification is soteriological, positional and legal
- Thus, they think all believers have a righteous standing before God, so that despite anything they might do, they are sure to be awarded at the Judgment Seat and included as Christ's bride and co-rulers because they've had Christ's righteousness credited to their account

10

- That is a major misinterpretation of Scripture which has been normalized for evangelical Christianity through 500 years of incessant teaching since the time of the Reformation
- Anyone who teaches otherwise is branded as ignorant or, worse yet, a heretic
- Christianity must get back to the correct interpretation of Scripture!
- Think of all the denominations that were started during the past 500 years alone because of misinterpretation of Scripture

11

What is James 2 NOT teaching?

- James is NOT teaching that a person becomes saved (regenerated) by faith plus works
 - James is talking to believers, not unbelievers
- Jas 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials (see also 2:1; 3:1; 2:14)
- James uses the word “brethren” 15X in the epistle!
 - He assumes those in his audience are already believers, children of God

12

- James is not teaching unbelievers how to be regenerated
- He is teaching believers how to live a life that is pleasing to God – how they should walk in victory, living a sanctified life – seeing they have been scattered in the dispersion
- James uses as his showcase illustrations two OT-era believers who did faith-filled works for God – like something right out of Heb. 11
- Those who believe God and live righteously carry out righteous works for God

13

- James speaks of Abraham offering Isaac on the altar (v. 21) and Rahab hiding the spies (v. 25)
- Those are clearly the actions of people who are believing God and acting in faith
- James applies these illustrations of faith-filled works to the believers in his audience, encouraging them to keep obeying God in faith and thereby doing good works
- They need this encouragement, because they have been dispersed due to persecution

14

- James doesn't want them to throw up their hands in despair and stop serving God
- He urges them to continue doing faith-filled works of righteousness
- To that end, James motivates them:
Jas 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

15

- As if to say, keep living righteously, producing faith-filled works, despite the overwhelming pressures of life bearing down upon you
- If you continue in endurance, you will be rewarded by Jesus!
- If you do NOT continue living righteously, producing faith-filled works, your soul will not be saved (which is a sanctification matter), and you will not be rewarded

16

James admonishes:

Jas 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

17

Obstacles to Soul-Salvation

1. Big talk, no action

Jas 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

- The emphasis in v. 14 is on the word "say"
- You can SAY that you are walking by faith until you are blue in the face
- But if you are not obedient, carrying out works of righteousness, then your faith is not saving you

18

- Remember, he's talking to believers – so the **SAVING** in v. 14 is not salvation of the spirit in the sense of regeneration
- It is salvation of the soul – or sanctification – unto reward at the Judgment Seat
- That is consistent with 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
- That's how James uses the word "save" in the entire epistle

19

Paraphrase of v. 14:

- "What good is it Christian, if you claim to be living by faith, but your life is lacking works or righteousness. Can that kind of faith save your soul?"
- Is that kind of faith victorious? Will it result in reward at the Judgment Seat?
- James goes on to give an example of a big talker

20

Jas 2:15-16 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 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?

- Take a brother or sister in Christ who obviously has tremendous financial needs
 - Naked (i.e., poorly clothed)
 - Not enough food to eat

21

- Knowing this, you put your arm around them and smile and pray and ask God to meet their need
- And you encourage them to depart in peace (or have a great day) and "just keep trusting the Lord, brother, because He is able to provide"
- But you do not minister to their needs – you do not give money to help them – you merely talk
- What good is that kind of faith?

22

Jas 2:17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

- Claiming that you are living by faith, even though you are not carrying out righteous, faith-filled works, is dead (lifeless, powerless faith)

Jas 1:22 Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

- Does big talk save your soul, preparing you to hear "Well done" at the Judgment Seat?

23

Obstacles to Soul-Salvation

2. Works done in the flesh

Jas 2:18 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.

- The first half of the verse is the obstacle; the last half of the verse is James' response
- The objection: "You have faith and I have works"

24

- These are Christians who are depending on self rather than the Spirit of God in doing works
- Many of these folks downplay the Spirit-filled life of victory; they may even poke fun at the deeper life crowd
- They mock those who claim to live by faith as if they were impractical
- This crowd, without realizing it, downplays dependence on God while promoting fleshly effort

25

- The mentality of much of Christianity is “struggle-theology”
- It reverses God’s order from faith-filled works to works done in one’s own strength that supposedly demonstrate one has faith
- It is the objection of James 2:18a: “You have faith and I have works.”

26

- God condemns this way of thinking in the latter half of the verse, where James argues back:
- 2:18b Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.**
- In other words, the biblical position is that righteous works will always characterize the child of God who is truly walking by faith, depending on God

27

Obstacles to Soul-Salvation

3. Assuming orthodoxy is enough

Jas 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

- The Jews were monotheistic
- Deut 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!
- Amidst all the idolatry around them, the Israelites who had scattered throughout Asia Minor continued to believe in Jehovah God
 - James says to them, “You do well”

28

- But it’s not enough merely to be orthodox or fundamental in doctrine!
 - Even demons are orthodox
 - They believe in one God; they know the doctrines of the Bible
- Jas 2:20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?**
- Orthodoxy and fundamental doctrine are important, but of themselves, they are insufficient

29

- You will not be rewarded merely because you hold to right doctrine
- That even goes for those who believe the doctrine of kingdom inheritance
- The point is, if you don’t act on right doctrine and become justified by a life of faith-filled works, then you will not be rewarded and will be excluded from the ruling realm of His kingdom
- Anything less is dead – lifeless, powerless, dead orthodoxy – it is vain and empty

30

Illustrations of Faith-Filled Works

1. Father Abraham

Jas 2:21 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.

31

Jas 2:24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

- Imagine being promised by God that you will be a father of many nations, yet you are quite old and have no children
- One would have to wonder – and Abraham did for a time, and so did his wife Sarah
- But in process of time they came to believe God completely
- Then Isaac was born when Abram was 100 years old and Sarah was 90

32

- But then imagine 15-20 years later, when God commands Abraham to offer his promised son Isaac on the altar
- Wouldn't most believers shrink away from such a command, doubting if it could really be true?
- But not Abraham; he obeys
- As he is about to plunge in the knife, the angel of the Lord stops him – and God declares His obedient servant righteous

33

- v. 22 says that Abraham's faith in offering Isaac worked together (i.e., his faith cooperated) with his works and thereby he was made *perfect* (complete or mature)
- Throughout life Abraham had a struggling, growing faith with many setbacks – and don't we all!
- But God continued to work with His servant, bringing him along, rounding off the rough edges through trials and tests – God did this refining work through Abraham's entire life

34

- The key is that Abraham submitted to God's working and grew into a mighty man of God
 - God works patiently with His children, to the extent that we cooperate with Him
- Phil 2:12-13** Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
- In other words, cooperate with God as He seeks to save your soul – let him do His maturing work in your life – don't resist Him!

35

Heb 12:5b-6 My son (Gr. *huios* – mature, first-born son), do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

36

- **Chastening** (from Gr. word *paideia*) is the entire process of child-training – including punishment, if necessary
- Those who submit to God’s chastening are His sons (Gr. *huios* = mature, firstborn sons)
- Those who do not submit are illegitimate (as *huios*, mature sons) – the implication is that they remain as *teknon*, immature children
- Heb. 12 clearly teaches that God only chastens those who are on the pathway of maturing unto reward

37

- Are you cooperating with God in His sanctifying and chastening work in your life?
- He is patiently working to bring you to maturity through trials and tribulations and tests over time
- If God had asked Abraham to offer Isaac much earlier, Abraham might not have been willing to do it
- But God knows the right timing; when He asked, Abraham was ready – he did not struggle; he was victorious

38

- This man of God offered his son Isaac in complete obedience and faith before God, and that obedience signified that his faith was now mature

Jas 2:23 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.

- God said that about Abraham 30+ years earlier, after God told Abraham that Eliezer of Damascus would not be his heir, but rather a son from his own body

39

Gen 15:6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

- Abraham believed what God said and acted on it
- Granted, he erred in the beginning by taking matters into his own hands and attempting to bring forth a son by his wife’s handmaid, Hagar
- Consequently, Ishmael became the son of his fleshliness

40

- God told him another would come of Sarah, and that son (Isaac) would be the promised heir
- When Abraham was mature enough to obey God and sacrifice his son at a much older age, he fulfilled what God said of him much earlier in his life – that he was a righteous man – and that characterized his entire life!
- None of this has anything to do with what we refer to as *regeneration* in the NT
- This is the OT equivalent of NT *soul-salvation*

41

- Abraham will be rewarded with a position of honor in the kingdom of the heavens, New Jerusalem, the city of reward, for Jesus said:

Matt 8:11 Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

- What an example of believing God and living righteously!
- James concludes the section on Abraham by saying: Jas 2:24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

42

Illustrations of Faith-Filled Works

2. Righteous Rahab

Jas 2:25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

- Rahab was known in the scriptures as a harlot – that was her past
- But she had believed in Jehovah God much earlier, long before the spies showed up
- She was already a “believer,” we might say
- She shares her testimony with the spies:

43

Josh 2:9 (She) said to the men: “I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

44

Josh 2:11 And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

- What a testimony! Rahab believed Jehovah long before the spies ever arrived
- When the spies arrived, her obedience in sparing God’s messengers was an act of faith
- In other words, her actions – despite the dangers – were an outward display of faith in the God she had believed in previously

45

- When the spies arrived, she (by faith) hid them, not fearing the consequences
- Her trust in Jehovah God led her to claim the promises of Israel –
 - The promise of victory over their enemies
 - The promise that the land was theirs to possess
- Rahab believed this too – and that is why she boldly hid the spies based on her God-dependence – her works were faith-filled

46

- The glorious result is that her faith resulted in deliverance (v. 14)
- Joshua spared her household, and Rahab was later married to an Israelite prince and became the great grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus

47

- James’ summary statement in v. 24:
Jas 2:24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.
- God declares those believers justified or righteous who are producing faith-filled works
- They are the ones on the pathway of soul salvation and kingdom inheritance
- They are avoiding the obstacles of:
 1. Big talk
 2. Works done in the flesh
 3. Assuming orthodoxy is enough

48

- **Are YOU avoiding the obstacles and being justified by faith-filled works?**
- **James tells us why this is so important**
Jas 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.
- **Just as a body without breath is lifeless, so having faith in God without righteous deeds is dead, empty, and powerless**
- **Is your faith dead or alive?**