

The Letter of James: Transformed by Christ

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 also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." 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 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.

James 2:14-26

What Kind of Faith Can Save?

1. Dead Faith (v.15-19)

- Example 1: Words of blessing without any action to meet physical needs; Christian words without Christian mercy (v.15-16)
- Example 2: Orthodox belief without obedience to God (v.19)

What Kind of Faith Can Save? (v.14)

1. Dead Faith (v.15-19)

2. Living Faith (v.20-26)

- Example 1: Abraham's costly obedience: sacrificing his promised son Isaac (v.20-24)
 - Genesis 22:1, "After these things God tested Abraham ..."
 - Genesis 22:12, "He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, *for now I know that you fear God*, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.'"

Does James contradict Paul?

1. There is a formal contradiction: the words are opposite to each other (James 2:24; Romans 3:28), however, the ideas are not contradictory (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).
2. Paul and James use the same words in different ways.
 - James: "Justify" means "to demonstrate a person's saving faith and righteousness."
 - Paul: "Justify" means "to declare a person righteous by faith" (e.g., Romans 4:3-5).
 - James: "faith apart from works" means empty words and a lack of mercy for others
 - Paul: "faith apart from works" means trusting in Jesus, not in outward acts of conformity to Jewish law of circumcision (Galatians 5:6)

Does James contradict Paul?

1. There is a formal contradiction: the words are opposite to each other (James 2:24; Romans 3:28), however, the ideas are not contradictory (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).
2. Paul and James use the same words in different ways.
3. Paul teaches the same thing that James does about judgment by works (e.g., Romans 2:6-11).

What Kind of Faith Can Save? (v.14)

1. Dead Faith (v.15-19)
2. Living Faith (v.20-26)
 - Example 1: Abraham's costly obedience: sacrificing his promised son Isaac (v.20-24)
 - Example 2: Rahab's risky mercy: sheltering and protecting the spies (v.25-26)

What Kind of Faith Can Save? (v.14)

Applications:

- Belief that does not lead to obedience and is unwilling to make costly sacrifices is dead faith, unable to save.
- Don't let arguments about enabling and creating dependence impede working out your faith in mercy to fellow Christians.