

Finer Grounds

James & Jude

Lesson 5: James 2:14-24

Read James 2:14-20

Transitioning into the last half of chapter two, James remains consistent in reminding the readers that true religion must be more than words, and true faith must manifest itself through action. Starting in vs. 14 James asks a sequence of rhetorical questions in which the Greek reveals a negative answer, which indicate that there is no use in faith apart from works! One cannot simply be a hearer; it is imperative that he is also a doer (James 1:22).

For someone to claim they possess faith, but not display it through works, is like the one who claims they are the best vocalist, and yet fail to sing. They may know the musical theory and learn the notes, but if the sound that follows does not match the music, it is all empty claims.

For the one who sees others in need (we know lesser treatment toward them is spoken against in chapter 2), there is danger when they also pretend, by a demonstration of deception, as one who is concerned. By simply extending a warm wish, though maybe outwardly sincere, is of no value without any intent behind it. It becomes completely void.

What are some other ways that actions parallel the idea of a worthless, vocal claim of faith?

While works in and of itself cannot save a person (Jesus IS necessary), one must have faith to obtain salvation, and work is an integral part of this faith (Jn. 6:27-29, 1 Thess. 1:3). Works, which are exhibited in response of a held faith, are a way in which a Christian can prove oneself. It presents their faith as genuine (1:4, 1:22, 1 Peter 1:6-9). In fact, in verse 18, the challenge is on! Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith BY MY WORKS. This is an opportunity to prove it. After all, as we read in verse 19, even the demons believe, so how does a simple belief (and declaration) benefit anyone? James tells us, in the following verse, that it isn't of any benefit! It is useless, or inoperative, and for anyone to think otherwise makes him or her. It puts one on the same side, makes them an ally, with the demons!

In-depth point: The literal translation for the word, "foolish", in verse 20 means: "empty-headed". The one who believes that he can exist without the Godly works has an empty head!

Knowing that a faith/no works concept is complete foolishness, how do you study with a person who believes in a system merely based on faith without works?

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Read James 2:21-24

Now James is beginning to ask questions that demand a positive response. Some believe that James used Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, as an example because those Jews, coming out of Christianity, still held a belief that being his descendant contained a guarantee of their salvation. However, Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, was justified (pronounced innocent) by his works when he offered up his son, Isaac. His faith was active alongside his works. He was obedient because of his faith! If Abraham had chosen to disobey God and save his earthly son's life by not offering him up on the altar, his claim of belief/faith in God would have been nothing more than empty words. "Works were the ground reason for which Abraham was declared righteous". Without works, Abraham's faith was not mature, or complete.

Read James 2:21-24

James now turns to another example, Rahab. This adds another dimension because this woman was not a descendant of Abraham, but rather she was a Gentile. By her actions of welcoming the spies, she coupled faith with obedience (works), which resulted in her justification.

As James closing out the chapter he uses an illustration we can all understand. While we know that the body without the spirit is dead, so is faith without works. It really is that simple.

What are some ways that a Christian can demonstrate that obedience to the Lord and His word, through works, is necessary?
