

James Lesson #9, Chapter 2:18-26

As you come to your lesson today, be sure to ask the Lord for insight and help as you study this rather technical and theologically dense section.

1. Briefly summarize James' train of thought in Chapter 2, paying special attention to his thought processes coming into verse 18.

2. What does James mean when he says in verse 17, "Faith without *works* is dead?" Consider James 1:22-26 and 2:14-17.

3. What are some synonyms or phrases you could use in place of "works" that might provide clarity as you look at verses 2:14-26? Try inserting your substitute words in the text (either mentally or by writing it out here) to see if they give more insight into James' meaning *while maintaining doctrinal precision*.

4. Verse 18 begins with an illustration that further explains James' comment in verse 17. What does the "someone" say about their own faith in verse 18?
 - a. What does that same "someone" say about "your" faith in verse 18?

 - b. Does that "someone" line up with what James is saying or do they oppose his reasoning? Consider your answer in light of verse 17 as well.

- c. What is the point of faith *with works*?
5. What do those who say, “faith without works is enough” believe according to verse 19? Is this a good thing according to James (verse 19)?
6. Who else believes that very same thing from verse 19? What does that point have to do with the whole “I have faith without works” argument?
7. Eager beaver: Consider what verse 19 reveals about what the demons know and believe about God. What do the demons know about God? See James 2:19; Matthew 8:28-29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Acts 16:16-17; 19:15. Isn't it interesting that the demons sometimes have a greater faith than even those who claim to be Christians?
8. The Scriptures *never, never, never* argue among themselves. They always agree with each other, though sometimes it may look like there are discrepancies, there aren't. It's our job then, to solve any apparent mysteries through study and observing the context. First, what point is James making about *faith that works* in this section?
- a. Next, look at Romans 3:21-4:25. What wrong thinking was Paul trying to correct as he discussed *faith and works*?
- b. How is Paul's use of *faith and works* different than James' use of *faith and works*?

- c. Context is a hermeneutical (Bible study) principle that easily provides us with the simplest answer for explaining the so-called discrepancy between Romans 3 and James 2.¹ How does examining the context of those two passages, resolve the supposed “tension” between what Paul writes in Romans 3 and what James penned in James 2? Isn’t it a wonderful comfort to know that this *one* hermeneutical principle solves most of the Scripture “problems” we come to in studying the Bible?

“Of the other writers in the NT we must notice James, for he has often been held to be in opposition to Paul in this matter. Where Paul insists that a man is justified by faith and not by works James maintains ‘that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone’ (Jas. 2:24). There is no more than a verbal contradiction, however. The kind of ‘faith’ that James is opposing is not that warm personal trust in a living Savior of which Paul speaks. It is a faith which James himself describes: ‘You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder’ (Jas. 2:19). He has in mind an intellectual assent to certain truths, an assent which is not backed up by a life lived in accordance with those truths (Jas. 2:15f.). So far is James from opposing faith in the full sense that he everywhere presupposes it. Right at the beginning of his Epistle he speaks naturally of ‘the testing of your faith’ (Jas. 1:3), and he exhorts his readers, ‘show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory’ (Jas. 2:1). He criticizes a wrong faith but assumes that everyone will recognize the need for a right faith. Moreover, by ‘works’ James does not mean what Paul means by that term. Paul thinks of obedience to the commands of the law regarded as a system whereby a man may merit salvation. For James the law is ‘the law of liberty’ (Jas. 2:12). His ‘works’ look uncommonly like ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ of which Paul speaks. They are warm deeds of love springing from a right attitude to God. They are the fruits of faith. What James objects to is the claim that faith is there when there is no fruit to attest it.”²

9. What does James desire his “faith without works” imaginary friend to understand in verse 20?
10. What does faith without works reveal about our salvation?

¹ *Context*. Context is our “fall back” hermeneutical principle that solves most all Bible study conundrums.

² *The New Bible Dictionary*, Logos Bible Software under “faith.”

11. Finish this thought: Dead (verse 17), useless (verse 20) faith is faith _____.

“Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than standing in the garage makes you a car.” Unknown

12. Based on all James has said in this section, is it possible to say we’re believers, walk in newness of life, be new creatures in Christ, and yet not walk in obedience or have evidence of a transformed life? Is it possible to live a life of faith without there being some evidence of faith, hope, and love in it?
13. Look up the following verses. What do each of these sections of Scripture attest to when it comes to a life of faith in Jesus Christ? See Matthew 7:15-23; John 15:1-4, 8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:10; Titus 2:11-14.
14. James then uses another example to hammer home his point that our faith must be a transforming faith, a faith that reveals itself in how it lives. What did Abraham’s already life-transforming faith prompt him to do according to verse 21?
15. To keep our thinking in this passage precise and accurate, let’s remind ourselves of Hebrews 11:6, 17-19; Romans 4:1-4. How does that information work with *James’ purpose in challenging the thinking* that faith that without life-transformation is saving faith?
16. According to verse 22, what were the results of Abraham’s works?
17. What does this teach you about how faith grows?

18. Look at verse 23 and note the progression. First, Abraham did what? Then what happened as a result? And that resulted in what happening for Abraham?
19. It's good to remember as you read verse 24 that when James is using works here, it means "faith that is lived out" or "faith that shows up in a transformed life" or "faith in God can't help but live it out." And as that faith is "living out" what is God doing in us (verse 24)?
20. James just can't help himself, so he gives another example of someone whose new-found faith was revealed in how they lived. What example is given in verse 25?
21. And just to make sure we get it, what comparison does James cite to drive home his point in verse 26?
22. There's just no way we can leave this impassioned instruction without considering our own lives. Consider if your faith does have works. What does that look like in your life? Remember, faith accompanied by deeds is *not the means* of salvation, but the *fruit* of salvation.
23. Now, brainstorm a bit and consider some of the ways, big and small, in which you live out your faith, that is, do works or deeds in your salvation. Now, narrow it down to today. How are you living out your faith, accompanied by deeds, today? These questions are not meant to lead us to self-congratulation, but rather for assessing the state of your soul.
24. Apply this statement to your daily life, "Faith without works is dead. Saying I believe God and love Him without putting faith, hope, obedience, service, and trust into practice is like those times when I... "

“In any and every case suitable works attend upon saving faith, and it is idle to claim to be saved by faith, unless our lives are holy.”³ Charles Spurgeon

“Faith is the root, good works are the fruits, and we must see to it that we have both. We must not think that either, without the other, will justify and save us. This is the grace of God wherein we stand, and we should stand to it.”⁴ Matthew Henry

³C. H. Spurgeon, [*The Interpreter: Spurgeon's Devotional Bible*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), 742.

⁴Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2414.