

Wisdom of the Bible ~ Faith and Deeds ~ Leader's Guide

1. In James 2:14, James speaks of a person having faith without deeds and asks, "Can such faith save him?" Can it?

Theoretically, yes. But one must ask if a faith without works is a true faith or simply intellectual assent or agreement with a Christian set of teachings, which would be an incomplete faith. James maintains that true faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts. If our lives remain unchanged, we don't truly believe the truths we claim to believe.

2. From a worldly perspective, why is it important to have deeds along with faith?

It demonstrates to others what it means to be a Christian. The main criticism that non-Christians have of Christians is that they are hypocrites: all words, no action.

3. What does Jesus say about faith and works (Matthew 7:26-27)?

Faith without deeds is no different than building a house on sand, which is quickly washed away. A faith without action has no foundation and can easily dissolve or be turned to another cause.

4. Proper motivation is important in understanding the value of our works. What are we being asked to do and why? (1 John 3:16-18) [Also see Q 11.]

We are to reach out with the love of God to anyone in need, not with words, but with actions. We are to do so because Christ gave his life for us.

5. Give a modern example of the situation described in verses James 2:15-16.

Does someone need to be picked up at the airport and you tell him of a good limo service instead of offering to get him? If someone is working in the blazing sun, do you give him a hat or warn him of the danger of getting sunburned? Did you go to the last clean-up day at your church? If not, why not? Today, giving up one's time to help someone in need is often more difficult than giving money.

6. Explain the meaning of James 2:18.

The Living Bible explains it as well as any: But someone may well argue, "You say the way to God is by faith alone, plus nothing; well, I say that good works are important too, for without good works you can't prove whether you have faith or not; but anyone can see that I have faith by the way that I act." James is saying that faith and deeds cannot exist independently of one another.

7. Doesn't James 2:18 contradict Paul in Romans 3:28 when he writes "man is justified (saved) by faith without the deeds (works) of the law"?

They appear to, but actually Paul is speaking out against those who attempt to be saved by deeds instead of true faith. Paul was also speaking to Jews who believed that to be saved, one must obey the laws of Moses. While it is true that our deeds cannot earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good deeds. Bottom line: faith brings us salvation; active obedience demonstrates that our faith is genuine.

8. What is the point of James 2:19? (Is only believing—or faith—enough?)

Again, the Living Bible explains it well: Are there still some among you who hold that "only believing" is enough? Believing in one God? Well, remember that demons believe this too—so strongly that they tremble in terror! The point is that "only believing" is definitely not enough.

9. Chronology (the order of events) is important when it comes to faith and works. Explain it in simple terms. Note the sequence in Ephesians 2:8-10.

First: God loves you so much that He is willing to save you by His grace. Second: you must have faith and believe in God's grace. Third: you must act on your faith.

10. Is there a similar sequence of events in the stories of Abraham and Rahab as summarized in James 2:21-25?

Yes. First faith and then a deed demonstrating it. You should take time to understand the complete story of Abraham in Genesis, chapters 12 to 23, and especially at 15:6.

In the case of Rahab, when Moses' spies came to Jericho, she hid them and helped them escape. In this way, her deeds demonstrated faith in God's purpose for Israel. As a result, she and her family were spared when the city was destroyed.

11. What do you think of Paul's description of our job and compensation package in 2 Corinthians 5:10, Colossians 3:23-24, and Titus 3:8. Are you motivated?

In Colossians, Paul tells us that we will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward and then in 2 Corinthians he says that in the final judgement, we will be held accountable for our actions while in human form, (not just for our faith). Motivating and a little scary, eh?

Wisdom of the Bible ~ Faith and Deeds ~ Scripture Verses

James 2:14-26 - ¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰ You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Matthew 7:26-27 - ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

1 John 3:16-18 - ¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Ephesians 2:8-10 - ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Colossians 3:23-24 - ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Titus 3:8 - This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.