

James 2:14-26 ~ Faith and Deeds ~ Leader's Guide

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

No. Faith without works is what might be called intellectual assent or agreement with a Christian set of teachings, but it would be an incomplete faith. 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. [Leader: allow ample time to discuss this and the following questions on faith and works as it is incredibly important and frequently misunderstood.]

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

It demonstrates to others what it means to be a Christian. H.L. Wilmington says, "a silent believer may indeed be a saint before God, but he remains a sinner before man until he walks the walk and talks the talk of Christian service."

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.

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.

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)

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.

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.

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? 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. In your own words, 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.

There are literally hundreds of thousands of pages in print and on the Internet that discuss this supposed disagreement between James and Paul and virtually every one of them comes to the exact same conclusion that there actually is no disagreement.

8. What is the point of James 2:19 where James says that even the demons have faith?

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 the “only believing” is definitely not enough.

9. Was Abraham saved by faith or works? (Genesis 15:3-6, Romans 4:3).

By faith when he believed that Sarah would have children that would inherit the earth. Furthermore, Abraham’s act of faith (Genesis 15:6) occurred before he offered up Isaac, which was only a proof of the genuineness of his faith.

Genesis 15:3-6 – ³ You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir.”

⁴ Then the Lord said to him, “No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir.” ⁵ Then the Lord took Abram outside and said to him, “Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!”

⁶ And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Romans 4:3 – For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.”

10. Chronology is important when it comes to faith and works. Paul explains the sequence in Ephesians 2:8-10. What are the three steps?

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.

Ephesians 2:8-9 – ⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

11. Was there a similar sequence in Abraham's story as summarized in James 2:21-24?

Yes. Take time to understand it. The whole story is in Genesis, chapters 12 to 23, but look especially at 15:6 (also in Q 9 above).

12. Explain the "job description" God gives us in Colossians 3:23-24.

Colossians 3:23-24 – ²³ Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. ²⁴ Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.

13. Do Paul's words in Colossians 3:23 (Q 12) and 2 Corinthians 5:10 provide motivation for letting your deeds demonstrate your faith?

2 Corinthians 5:10 – For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.

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). Scary, eh?