

For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

-First Corinthians 14:8, 9-

Faith Without Works!

"Can a person be saved by faith, without any works at all?" How often this question arises and how important it is to know the *Biblical* answer.

Let me be blunt. Not only is it true that a person can be saved by faith without any works of any kind, but it is the only way that anyone can ever be saved at all. Consider some of the clear statements by God concerning this important matter:

Ephesians 2:8, 9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that [being saved] not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Titus 3:5: *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration [new birth] and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*

II Timothy 1:9: [God] *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.*

Romans 4:5: *But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.*

Romans 11:6: *And if [salvation is] by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*

But What About the Second Chapter of James: "Faith Without Works is Dead?"

As soon as salvation by faith alone in Christ alone is brought up by a Christian who is clear on the issues of grace and works, someone invariably mentions James, chapter two. Verse 17 of the chapter says, *"Thus also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* And verse 21 adds, *"Was not Abraham our father justified [considered or declared righteous] by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?"*

I'm always delighted to examine this portion of James with one who is sincerely seeking to know the truth of the matter because James is very clear, not only regarding to whom he is writing, but

why he is writing; that is, the thrust of his writing.

To Whom is James Writing? What Point is He Attempting to Make?

The passage covers verses fourteen through verse twenty-six, and verses 14-17 is the key to the entire passage.

James (under the Holy Spirit's direction) asks a question in verses 14 and 16 which is the foundation for understanding the entire passage.

"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

It's important to notice several key points here. First, James is addressing fellow believers. He calls them "my brethren" in verse 14. He goes on to speak of "a brother or sister" who comes for help; a clear indication that *he is speaking of a relational matter between believers.*

Secondly, the issue of the entire passage is "what does it profit?" (vs. 14 and 16). What does *what* profit? What profit is there in doing *nothing* for needy believers but offering pious platitudes when one *could do* something concrete to relieve those needs? Such an illustration is analogous of faith without works. Such faith is dead.

The question then is, "What is meant by faith being *dead*?" The word "dead" in this passage comes from a Greek word meaning *unfruitful, barren or nonproductive.* Some assume "faith without works" means that true faith is not present. However, "dead" here does not mean *nonexistent.* The discussion centers around the fruitfulness (or lack of fruitfulness) of a faith that does not produce works. The passage does not define *saving faith*; instead it describes the *condition* of a faith that is not accompanied by good works.

For instance, if I told you that the battery in my minivan is dead, I wouldn't mean that I didn't have a battery (nonexistent); I would mean that it

was not producing juice; there would be no power coming from it. The battery would be there under the hood where it is supposed to be. It just would be in a temporary condition of being useless insofar as it being effective in turning over the motor when I turn the key in the ignition. So it is in James: the "dead" faith is a *nonproducing* faith, a *barren*, an *unfruitful* faith -- but faith, nonetheless.

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**"If you believe what you want  
about the Gospel, it is not the Gospel  
you believe, but yourself."**  
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Abraham Offering Isaac: What Does It Demonstrate?

James uses Abraham as an illustration of faith and works being joined together to produce the perfected, complete, mature faith. *Was not Abraham our father justified [considered or declared righteous] when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect [complete or fullgrown]?* (vs. 21, 22).

Was James speaking of Abraham having faith or of his faith being matured?

How can we tell? Well, first of all, we consider the immediate context. Verse twenty-two clearly states that *"by works his faith was made perfect"* or that it was perfected or matured. Nothing in the passage suggests that when Abraham offered up Isaac that his faith was initiated at that moment in his life.

We also consider the testimony of the rest of Scripture on the same topic. The twenty-third verse of this second chapter of James quotes Genesis 15:6 which says, Abraham "believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Now when God accounted Abraham's faith as righteousness Isaac was not even born! Yet, James 2:21 states that Abraham was "justified by works **when** he offered his son Isaac on the altar" -- perhaps as much as fifteen years after God declared Abraham righteous by faith alone. Do we have a contradiction here? Not when we consider all of the Scripture's testimony on this.

Was James illustrating Abraham's faith before men or before God?

Again we ask, "How can we tell?" We discover the answer to this question in the same way

we discovered the answer to the previous question, by considering the context and other verses which touch on the same subject.

First, a reminder: the point of the passage is the proper relationship between believers who are in need and those who could help alleviate that need (vss. 14-16 - *What does it profit?*) Secondly, "dead faith" speaks of the barren, nonproducing faith of a believer, not whether or not the "brother" has faith in the first place.

Turning to other Scripture, it is clear that Abraham's justification *before God* was by faith alone, and his justification *before men* was by faith demonstrated by good works. Romans 4:1-5 is the key. *What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, **but not before God**. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.*

Before God we are justified by faith alone; before men we are justified by faith and works. James makes a key point: *But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works* (v. 18). Is it possible to show one's faith before others without works? Of course not. And that is the point. The "brother" in verse 14 did *not* show faith by works, but Abraham and Rahab (vs. 21, 25) *did* demonstrate their faith by their works. But *before* the demonstration before men was the faith before God. The passage does not teach that by the works of Abraham and Rahab their faith came into existence. No, their faith was present and recognized by God before it was ever demonstrated by their works.

Scripturally speaking, works should follow saving faith. Ephesians 2:10 is clear on this: *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* Also, Titus 3:8: *This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who **have believed** in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. **The Biblical pattern:** faith in Christ for justification before God (eternal salvation); works before men for effective fruitfulness and testimony.* ×

Richard A. Seymour

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Post Office Box 10 • LaGrange, WY 82221-0010