

## LESSON FIVE – JAMES & JUDE

### JAMES 2:14-27

Faith is a key doctrine in the Christian faith. We are saved by faith; we walk by faith; without faith it is impossible to please God. It has been said that faith is not believing in spite of evidence, but obeying in spite of consequence. Hebrews 11, the faith chapter of the Bible, uses as examples men and women who acted on God's word no matter what price they had to pay. Faith is not some kind of nebulous "better felt than told" emotion that we work up; faith is confidence that God's word is true and that acting on that word will bring His blessing.

In this section James discusses the relationship between faith and works. This is an important discussion because if we are wrong in this matter we jeopardize our eternal salvation. What kind of faith really saves a person? Is it necessary to perform good works in order to be saved? How can a person tell whether he possesses true saving faith? James answers these questions by explaining three kinds of faith, only one of which is saving faith.

- 1) Dead Faith (vv. 14-17).
  - a) People with dead faith substitute words for deeds.
    - i) They know the vocabulary for prayer and religious discussions, can even quote a few verses from the Bible, but their walk does not measure up to their talk.
    - ii) They think their words are as good as deeds; James says that they are wrong.
  - b) James illustrates dead faith by postulating a poor believer who came into the assembly without proper clothing and in need of food.
    - i) The person with dead faith saw his needs, but did nothing to meet them except utter a few pious words – "Depart, be ye warmed and filled."
    - ii) The visitor went away just as naked and just as hungry as when he came in.
  - c) Food and clothing are basic needs of life.
    - i) Paul told Timothy that one who possessed food and clothing should be content. 1 Tim. 6:8.
    - ii) Jesus taught that the Father knows that we have need of these things. Matt. 6:31-32.
    - iii) Jacob included these basic things in his prayer to God. Gen. 28:20.

- iv) As God's people we have an obligation to meet the needs of people no matter who they may be. Gal. 6:10; Matt. 25:40.
  - v) To help a person in need is an expression of love, and faith works by love. Gal. 5:6; 1 John 3:17-18.
  - vi) The priest and the Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan had religious training, but neither of them paused to help the dying man by the side of the road (Luke 10:25-37); each of them was ready to defend his faith, but neither of them demonstrated that faith by loving works.
- d) James tells us that that kind of faith cannot save (the form of the question in the Greek demands a negative answer).
- i) That kind of faith, James says, is dead. v. 15.
  - ii) True faith is never alone; it issues in good works. Eph. 2:10.
- 2) Demonic faith (vv. 18-19).
- a) It comes as a shock to folks that demons have faith.
    - i) What do they believe?
      - (1) They believe in the existence of God; they are neither atheists nor agnostics.
      - (2) They believe in the deity of Christ; whenever they met Christ when He was on earth, they bore witness to his sonship (Mark 3:11-12).
      - (3) They believe in a place of eternal punishment (Luke 8:31).
      - (4) They recognize Christ as the Judge (Mark 5:1-13).
    - ii) "Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4); this (the Shema) was the twice daily (morning and evening) affirmation of the godly Jew.
    - iii) You believe there is one God; James says you are doing well; even the devils believe that and tremble or shudder.
    - iv) Dead faith touched only the intellect; demonic faith also touched the emotions.
  - b) But it is not a saving faith to believe and tremble.
    - i) A person can be enlightened in his mind and stirred in his heart and be lost forever; if demons might have such faith and remain in perdition, men might hold it and go to perdition.
    - ii) Saving faith involves something more – Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works (v. 18).
  - c) How could a person show his faith without works?
    - i) Without works, all you can do is talk; talking only has never gotten the job done!

- ii) Faith that is barren (dead) is not saving faith.
- 3) Dynamic Faith (vv. 20-26).
  - a) Dynamic faith is based on the Word of God.
    - i) We receive our spiritual rebirth through the word. James 1:18.
    - ii) Faith comes by hearing the word of God. Rom. 10:17
  - b) Faith is in the right object.
    - i) Some bow before a god of wood or stone and trust it to help them, but they receive no aid.
    - ii) No matter how much faith a person might have, it will accomplish nothing if it is not directed at the right object.
    - iii) “Do you believe” is not a meaningful question unless the right answer is given to the question, “In what or in whom do you believe?”
    - iv) We are not saved by faith in faith; we are saved by faith (not faith alone) in Christ.
  - c) Dynamic faith involves the whole man.
    - i) Dead faith involves the intellect; demonic faith involves the intellect and the emotions; dynamic faith involves the intellect, the emotions, and the will.
    - ii) The mind understands the truth; the heart desires the truth; the will acts upon the truth.
    - iii) The men and women of Hebrews 11 were people of action; God spoke and they obeyed.
    - iv) “Faith is not believing in spite of the evidence; it is obeying in spite of the consequences.
  - d) Dynamic faith leads to action.
    - i) Dynamic faith is not intellectual contemplation or emotional consternation; it leads to obedience on the part of the will.
    - ii) And this obedience is not an isolated event; it continues in good works throughout the whole life.
  - e) James illustrated this faith with two illustrations – Abraham and Rahab.
    - i) Two more different people could not be found.
    - ii) Abraham was a Jew; Rahab was a Gentile.
    - iii) Abraham was a godly man; Rahab was a sinful woman, a harlot.
    - iv) Abraham was a friend of God; Rahab belonged to the enemies of God.
  - f) What did they have in common: both had dynamic faith.
    - i) Abraham was justified by works and not by faith alone (vv. 22-24).
    - ii) Rahab was justified by works (v. 25).

- 4) Faith apart from works is as dead as a body without the spirit (v. 26); there is as much necessity that faith and works should be united to constitute true religion, as there is that body and soul should be united to constitute a living person.
- 5) James point is not that works must be added to faith, but that true faith includes works.

- 1) Do James and Paul contradict each other?
  - a) In the thinking of some, Romans 3:28 and James 2:24 are contradictory.
    - i) According to Paul Abraham was justified by faith and not by works.
    - ii) According to James, Abraham was justified by works and not by faith alone.
  - b) Many denominationalists who teach that salvation is by faith alone (*sole fides*) have difficulty in explaining why there is no contradiction between them. Some of the explanations would be humorous if the error contained were not so serious. It is not our purpose here to refute those positions directly. What we hope to do is to search the scripture to see what the scripture teaches. If we can establish the teaching of scripture, and we can, then that truth will refute false teaching.
  - c) If Paul's and James' statements are paralleled they do in fact seem contradictory.
    - i) Both use the term "justified"; both use the term "works"; both use the term "faith."
    - ii) Paul speaks of being justified by faith apart from works; James speaks of being justified by works and not by faith alone.
  - d) An examination of the context of these two passages demonstrates that Paul and James do not use the terms justified, faith, and works in the same sense.
  - e) Paul's use of the terms in Romans 3:21 – 4:25.
    - i) "Faith" is used as the principle of justification in contrast to the Law of Moses as the principle of acceptance by God.
      - (1) He is discussing the basis of the human relationship to God, the basis on which one becomes a part of the covenant people of God.
      - (2) Faith is contrasted to physical birth and circumcision as the means of becoming the children of Abraham.

- (3) Rom. 4:21 defines the “faith” that Paul is describing: Abraham was “fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” and acted on that trust in obedience to God’s commands.
- (4) It may be proper to extend the principle of Paul’s argument to encompass any works that are made a basis of justification and an attitude of “law-keeping” as the basis of salvation, but this extended application still does not exclude baptism as an act of faith by which one enters into the relationship with God (Rom. 6:1-11) nor the necessity of doing good works after one becomes a Christian (Rom. 12-13).
- ii) Paul defines the “works” of which he speaks as “works prescribed by the Law,” Rom. 3:28, that is, the Law of Moses, including circumcision, given to the Jews.
- iii) Paul makes clear that his use of “justification” relates to God’s activity in declaring a people righteous, in bringing a people into relationship with him.
- f) James use of the terms in James 2.
  - i) James refers to the good works of the Christian life.
    - (1) He defines what he is talking about in vv. 15-17: clothing the naked and feeding the hungry; his context for those works is “brother or sister.”
    - (2) He is not talking about works done in order to become a Christian.
  - ii) “Justification” as used by James refers to righteous conduct that is approved by God , ultimately at the last judgment.
  - iii) “Faith” as used by James refers to the act of believing, or more specifically, giving mental assent to a proposition.
    - (1) What he means by “faith” is clear from 2:19: “Even the demons believe – and tremble.”
      - (a) The demons know that God exists, but they do not act accordingly. There is a great deal of difference between this kind of faith and the trusting faith Paul is talking about in Romans.
      - (b) V. 17, “So faith, by itself, if it has no works is dead,” may have a wider application to include a principle that God requires an active, working faith, but in this context the reference is not to works by which one becomes a Christian but works done after and because one is a Christian.

- 2) Paul does not exclude works of obedience to God as a basis of salvation and James does not teach that salvation is merited by obedience.
  - a) For example, in Romans chapter 6 Paul makes it clear beyond dispute that baptism is essential to salvation and is, therefore, not inconsistent to salvation by faith.
  - b) In other contexts where Paul speaks of Christian activities he uses “work” favorably, *e.g.*, 1 Thess. 1:3.
  - c) In Galatians Paul also has a strong refutation of salvation based upon the ceremonial aspects of the Law of Moses, yet in Gal. 5:6 he says that the only thing that counts is “faith which worketh by love.”
  - d) Philippians 2:12-13 offers another way to express the relations of faith and works: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”
    - i) The word translated “work out” can mean “accomplish, achieve.”
    - ii) The thought is not to produce or bring about one’s salvation, but to bring salvation to fulfillment or accomplishment, to make it actual or effective
- 3) Conclusion: Paul and James are not contradictory; to the contrary, they are completely harmonious.
  - a) Faith and baptism.
    - i) The perspective developed on a conditional promise and illustrated from Naaman (2 Kings 5) and the fall of Jericho (Heb. 11:30) helps to explain the relation of the New Testament teaching on faith and on baptism.
    - ii) Faith saves, but when? At the point of believing, or when the divine condition attached to the promise is met?
    - iii) Baptism is an act of faith, not a work in the sense of Romans 4.
      - (1) Its place in the human response to God’s action in Christ has been addressed more fully in the lessons on the church and in answers to questions on [www.thywordistruth.com](http://www.thywordistruth.com), but suffice it to say here that as a condition attached to God’s promise of salvation it is not opposed to faith. Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:26-27.
      - (2) Faith is the reason why a person is a child of God; baptism is the time when one is incorporated into Christ and so becomes a child of God.
    - iv) Baptism is not a work either in the sense of merit or of Christian works.
      - (1) One cannot define “work” in such a way to include baptism and exclude faith.

- (2) There is a sense in which faith itself is a work. John 6:28-29.
  - (3) Some have tried to make the work in v. 29 something that God does, but the question of v. 28 that is being answered makes it clear that it is something that human beings do.
  - (4) So if “work” is something that human beings do, then faith no less than baptism is a work.
  - (5) If “work” is taken to mean something meritorious, then baptism no more than faith is a work.
  - (6) If works are understood as good deeds done because of salvation, then baptism is not a work because it is something done to a person to receive salvation according to God’s promise not something done by a person to others for their benefit, *e.g.*, providing food and clothing.
  - (7) Both faith and baptism are conditions of salvation. Mark 16:16.
- v) The teaching of baptism for the remission of sins (see website, above) is not a contradiction to justification by faith.
- (1) Indeed, being baptized for the remission of sins is an expression of justification by faith.
  - (2) Baptism is an act of faith, dependent on the promise of God and a submission to him as the appointed way of claiming the promise.
  - (3) The death and resurrection of Christ are the basis of salvation on the divine side.
  - (4) Faith is the basis of salvation on the human side.
  - (5) Baptism represents the “when,” not the “how” (God’s action), nor the “why” (faith) of salvation.
  - (6) It is the appointed time at which that salvation offered to faith is applied and becomes effective in the persons life.
- b) Faith and obedience.
- i) Faith involves obedience.
  - ii) One obeys the real object of his faith.
    - (1) Abraham’s faith led him to obey God’s voice. Gen. 22:18.
    - (2) One of the meanings of faith is faithfulness; the book of Hebrews discusses this aspect of faith. Heb. 3:1-14; 10:22-23, 39; 11:1 – 12:2.
    - (3) Faithfulness requires obedience.
  - iii) Faith and obedience are combined in the Bible.
    - (1) Paul spoke of “obedience of faith” at the beginning and end of Romans. Rom. 1:5; 16:26.

- (2) The phrase refers to the obedience that accompanies faith or “faithful obedience.”
- (3) From the Biblical perspective, faith and obedience are equivalent.
- (4) There was no faith that was not obedient; the Hebrew word for faith (*emuna*) included trust and obedience.
- (5) The antithetical parallelism of John 3:36 is instructive: “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”
  - (a) The opposite of belief is expressed not as unbelief, but as disobedience.
  - (b) The opposite of disobedience is belief.
  - (c) Compare also, the equivalence of disobedience and unbelief in Hebrews 3:18-19.
  - (d) In other words, faith means obedience.