

James 2:14-26

Commentary: The Relationship Between Faith and Works (James 2:14-26)

In his discussion of favouritism in the Church (2:1-13) James urged believers to be genuine and warned of superficial self-deception. There was a larger issue that came out of this display of favouritism that James was quick to address in the next section of chapter two; the relationship between faith and works.

True, genuine faith in Jesus produces evidence (works) to back up the claim. Certain individuals were speaking the language of Christianity without reflecting the reality of its truth in their lives. They were all talk and no walk. James challenges his readers to examine the vitality of their faith in Jesus Christ. True faith must always lead to action otherwise it is a dead faith, useless to everyone.

Instructions:

Carefully read through James 2:14-26 and then attempt to answer the questions which follow.

James states that there is no “use” (v14) or no benefit if we say we have faith in Christ but do not live out the message of that gospel through our words and deeds.

We have a “dead” (v17) faith that is so spiritually deficient that it calls into question its very reality.

1) What hypothetical situation does James use to illustrate such a dead faith (v14-17)?

2) How should believers **not** respond to someone who is truly in need (v15-16)?

3) What is the evidence of faith that is alive (v17)?

James stresses that faith and works always go together; that works of righteousness are the expression of true faith. It is not enough to just have a head knowledge of God or recognise His reality.

4) What example does James use to make this point (v18-19)?

5) What do even the demons believe – and how do they react? (v19)

Paul often used the term “justified” to refer to a person’s right standing before God based on Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross (Rom 3:24). James uses the term “justified” in verse 21 to refer to God affirming a person based on his or her righteous actions; in other words, their works validate their faith.

He draws on the story of Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice to reinforce his point (refer Genesis 22).

6) How did Abraham’s actions bring his faith and works together (v20-22)?

Abraham actively demonstrated his faith in God through his willingness to sacrifice Isaac (the son whom decades before God had promised to him) and the Lord accredited to Him as righteousness (Gen 15:6).

7) What conclusion does James make based on this story about the relationship between faith and works (v23-24)?

James offers a second Old Testament story to reinforce his theme. Rahab professed her faith in God when she said to the Israelite spies, “The Lord your God, He is God in heaven and on earth beneath” (Josh 2:11).

8) How did she then act on this faith?

9) What conclusion does James reach about faith and works based on her story (v25-26)?

10) What analogy does James use to show the uselessness of faith without works (v26)?