

As you read through James, you may have noticed that James is not an easy book. James is like the Law of the NT. It commands us to obey God's Word. For example, we are told to consider all kinds of trials pure joy. Trials normally bring us pain and suffering, but James commands us to be patient and even consider them pure joy. He also says listening to the Word is not enough. We need to act on the Word; otherwise we are deceiving ourselves, deceiving we are good Christians when we are not. Last week, we read that we should not show any favoritism even though we could have our own preferences. If we show favoritism, we are not genuine Christians. James is teaching us how to live by faith. Christian life is more than having knowledge about God; it is about acting out our faith. This is the main theme of James. Today's passage applies that again. What does it mean to live by faith? What is true faith? Let's find out. [James 2:14-26]

You may be surprised with today's words. Particularly, verse 24, "*A person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*" This is not what we used to hear. We have learned that we are saved by faith alone, '*Sola Fide,*' which is one of the main teachings of Christianity. Paul said in Romans 3:28, "*A man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.*" He also says in Galatians 2:16, we should "*know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ*" (Galatians 2:16a). It is confusing, isn't it? Is James contradicting Paul? Who is right?

The truth is that Paul and James are not different in understanding faith and works and their relationship to justification. When Paul reached out to gentiles with a message of "salvation by faith alone", the Jews in Jerusalem didn't agree with Paul because they thought believers should keep Moses' Law. When there was a big debate, it was James who supported and encouraged Paul to continue to spread the good news of Jesus to the gentiles. James agrees with Paul. Then, how can we understand our text? There seems to be a conflict between Paul and James because they are using some key terms in slightly different ways. So, we need to look at some key words within the context.

The first word to which we need to pay attention is "be justified." The Greek word (δικαιόω, *dikaioō*) for "being justified" is a term used in the court. It indicates the result of being justified. Because of the status, a judge may sentence, "not guilty" (cf. Lk 23:41). This word is also used to "show or prove to be right" (cf. Rom. 3:4). It is the same word with slightly different nuances – one for the result and the other for the process. This is how Paul and James used it. When Paul says "justification by faith alone", he is implying the status of being justified. James uses the word (δικαιόω, *dikaioō*) to explain the process, "sanctification."

This explains how the word "deed" (ἔργον, *ergon*) is used differently. Both Paul and James agree that we must obey God in our deeds. James describes "deeds" after salvation. He is referring to works of love and mercy that Christians need to do to fulfil the law of love. On the other hand, Paul describes "deeds" before salvation, referring to works of the law. So, Paul's deeds have nothing to do with faith. That is why Paul says over and over that the works of the law cannot bring salvation, but faith alone can.

Therefore, Paul is implying 'saving faith', which is the only means of salvation. But, James says it differently, "*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?*" (v.14) The question in verse 14 suggests that James denies that faith can save, but he is not talking about 'saving faith.' There is a key word in the second question, the article, "the" or "such." "Such faith" (ὁ πιστις) is referring to the faith just mentioned: the faith a man claims to have but has no deeds. "Such faith" cannot save because it is dead. "Such faith" is not true faith. Consequently, it doesn't produce good deeds. James is saying that those who have "such faith" are not true Christians yet.

Then, what are the characteristics of true faith? What will we do differently if we have true faith? First of all, those who have true faith will care for struggling brothers and sisters. When a brother or sister comes with some difficulties, how do we respond? Do we say, "*Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed*" (v.16b)? Or, similarly will we say, "I will pray for you. God will provide for your need. Go in peace"? The words sound so pious and godly, but they may actually mean, "Go away from me. It is not my business. Leave me alone!" James asks "*What good is that faith?*" Nothing. "*Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*" (v.17).

When James introduces a brother or sister without clothes and daily food, he is implying struggling brothers and sisters who are in every church. Yes, I said every church. Some churches may be richer than others, but every church has someone who needs to be cared for. The rich church needs to go out and accept the poor in the community. All churches on earth have some who need to be cared for and nurtured. This is the church where we are helped and help. The church is where we learn and teach. No one should say "I am not hungry, so I don't need to help" or, "I don't need to learn, so I don't teach." That is not the church Christ built. As long as we live in this world, until we, as a church, are lifted up to meet Jesus, we need to help each other. We all need to learn from each other. This is how we can show our genuine faith.

Also, true faith will produce good deeds. James presents one imaginary person in verse 18. He says, "*You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do*" (v.18). James is implying that if faith doesn't come with good deeds, that faith is dead. Is justification by faith alone? Yes, we are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone. Genuine faith will produce good works. Faith is the root of our salvation and our actions are the fruit of faith.

Jesus taught us the same thing. When you light a lamp at night, will you hide the lamp under a bowl? No one will do that. We will put the lamp on its stand so it gives light to everyone in the house. "*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16). We are told not to show off our good deeds to others, but people will notice the actions out of our faith, and they will praise God because of you. True faith will show our good deeds to the people around us.

James uses two people to explain how we need to show good deeds to others – Abraham and Rahab. "*Abraham was considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar*" (v.21). Do you remember what we studied about Abraham about 4 years ago? "*Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness*" (Genesis 15:6) – that was about 30 years before Abraham offered Isaac. James implies that Abraham's obedience is the evidence

of true faith. By faith, Abraham became righteous and by his obedience, Abraham was called righteous again. *“His faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did”* (v.22). The righteous will continue to obey God and show good deeds to others. In the same way, Rahab trusted in God and put it into action. She didn’t know all about military things. She hadn’t seen how strong or dependable Israel was, but she trusted in God. She risked not only her life but also her family. Rahab was declared righteous because her faith became action. With these two examples, James concludes, *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead”* (v .26). Faith must come with deeds.

As I said earlier, this passage has been very controversial. Between faith and deeds, people have been arguing about which one comes first and which one is more important. From there, different denominations have been formed. In our church, we believe in *‘Sola Fide’*, only by faith we are justified, but we consider both faith and works are important. Faith comes first, but if we have true faith in God, we will act out our faith. If you carefully read the Bible, you can notice that many commands will be done by the church and through the church. That is why we come to the church. Not only worshiping God, but we are also trying to serve one another and learn from each other. Again, the church is the place where we learn how to love. In this place, we develop perseverance, and we learn to control our tongue. So, brothers and sisters, when you serve the church, please don’t be disappointed. You are in the right place. Jesus wants to use you for the church and through the church. As we become more mature in our faith, we will go out together, as a church, to the community and to those who need our help. We are here together to learn how to live by faith. Amen.