

## What about James chapter 2:14-26?

In this passage James is discussing the fact that not just everyone who gives "mental assent" or agreement with Christ possesses the KIND of faith that SAVES, but only those whose faith is proved genuine by how that faith manifests itself, namely good works. Here he says "**faith without works is dead**", meaning that the KIND of faith that has no living proof that it is real, is really not the genuine KIND of faith that SAVES. Therefore if someone says he believes in Christ, but does not live in a consistent manner with Christ's teaching, he is no better off than a demon destined for hell (verse 19).

**James 2:14-26 - 14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?** 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? **17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.** 18 But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? **21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works,** when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? **22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;** 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. **24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.** 25 And in the same way **was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works,** when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, **so also faith without works is dead.** NASB

Here James is laboring to show **the nature of true faith**, much like Jesus and Paul and John. James points out very clearly that the KIND of faith that SAVES, in **contrast** to the KIND of faith that mere professors or demons have, is "**justified**" (proved positive) by what it does. This thought is carried on by James from the verses in chapter 1 calling us to be "**doers of the Word.**"

**James 1:22-25 - 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers** who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a **hearer of the word and not a doer**, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, **not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer**, this man shall be blessed in what he does. NASB

Justified in the context of James 2:14-26, is speaking not in legal terms of the judgment bar of God, but rather is the *sense* of proving real, or proving righteous the existence of true faith. Paul spoke in a similar manner in Acts 26 when testifying before King Agrippa.

**Acts 26:20-21 - 20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.** NASB

Therefore he is NOT saying that the works somehow justify us before God, but that they are proof positive that the KIND of faith we have is the REAL thing. He surely does NOT mean that the works justify us in the sight of God in some kind of meritorious way. This would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture that justification before God is a "**gift by His grace**" and is "**apart from works**" and received by faith alone in Christ alone.

**Romans 3:22, 24 - 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;** for there is no distinction; .... 24 being **justified as a gift by His grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; NASB

**Romans 3:28 - 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.** NASB

**Romans 4:5-6 - 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.** NASB

**Galatians 2:16 - 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law** but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since **by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.** NASB

**Ephesians 2:8-9 - 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith;** and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9 **not as a result of works**, that no one should boast. NASB

**Philippians 3:9-10** - 9 and may be found in Him, **not having a righteousness of my own** derived from the Law, but that which is **through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,** NASB

James cannot be teaching that justification before God as a legal declaration, such as Paul discusses in Romans 3:19-28, happens by good works. If this were true it would call into question the sufficiency of the atonement to justify us before God. We saw this very clearly in *pages 68-75* of our lesson, that we are saved by the grace(unmerited favor) of God through faith(apart from works) in Jesus Christ ONLY.

**Titus 3:4-7** - 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy,** by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly **through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that being justified by His grace** we might be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. NASB

Good works cannot justify before God because although they could be seen as meritorious before God in the future, they have no value to propitiate the wrath of God for sins already committed in the past, neither can they propitiate sins committed in the future. Further, they cannot absolve of guilt or expiate previous or future sins. Good works have no positive value in atoning for or covering over sins. They merely show the reality of the existence of faith before men. As James clearly points out, the good works “*justify*” our faith or prove positive our faith and show it to be real and genuine. God has no need to see good works to know if faith is genuine because He is the One who foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies and glorifies (Rom 8:29-30). He knows our hearts and minds better than we do! More than this, He is the One who gives faith in the act of regeneration (Eph 2:8-9, Tit 3:4-7) and therefore knows the persons to whom He gives it. Justification is a “*gift by His grace*” which is based on the merits of Christ alone!

**Romans 3:23-24** - 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 **being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;** NASB

In summary, James is simply and clearly teaching that **true believers are not mere professors** but have the positive qualities of good works that prove their faith true and genuine. Albert Barnes comments on this passage... “*The ground of justification in the case is faith, and that only; the evidence of it, the carrying it out, the proof of the existence of the faith, is good works; and thus men are justified and saved not by mere abstract and cold faith, but by a faith necessarily connected with good works, and where good works perform an important part.*” James is pointing out that faith is not just mental assent or agreement with the Gospel but a life response which produces a changed life. Wayne Grudem comments on this passage and makes this point clear.... “*James is concerned to show that mere intellectual agreement with the gospel is a “faith” that is really no faith at all. He is concerned to argue against those who say they have faith but show no change in their lives. He says, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18). “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26). James is simply saying here that “faith” that has no results or “works” is not real faith at all; it is “dead” faith..... James is saying that a person is “shown to be righteous by his works, and not by his faith alone.” This is something with which Paul also would certainly agree (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 5:19–24).*” James tells us we cannot be **hypocrites** who say we have faith but have no proof that true faith exists. Rather, he tells us that we must not be hearers only but doers of the word if we have true faith. The KIND of faith that SAVES is a living faith that proves itself positive and genuine because “*faith without works is dead.*”

**James 2:14-26** - **14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?** 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? **17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.**