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THE BEREANS

ACTS 17:11

Bereans "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so."

1

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THE BEREANS

ACTS 17:11

*James 2:14-26
Lesson #12
Useful Faith
08/17/2025*

2

Hard Questions

Are we justified by faith or by works?

Martin Luther
1522 Preface to James

"Therefore St James' epistle is really an epistle of **straw**, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it"



3

1 Corinthians 3

12 Now if any man **builds upon the foundation** with gold, silver, precious stones, **wood, hay, straw**, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ...
15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet as through fire."

works of the Spirit

works of the flesh

**Christ
The Foundation**



4

An apparent conflict

Paul	James
(Faith > justification > works)	(Faith > works > justification)
<i>Romans 3:28</i> "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."	<i>James 2:24</i> "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."

5

Martin Luther

Paul (faith)	James (works)
Passive righteousness makes us fit for heaven.	Practiced righteousness makes us fit for earth.



6

2 Timothy 2

“15 **Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.** 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,”

The relationship of faith to works is serious
calling for wisdom, humility, and caution.

2 Peter 2:16

“... as also in all *his* (Paul's) letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which **the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.**”

Understanding apparent conflicts calls for
WISDOM.

7

Wisdom in reading Scripture

Worldview - big picture

Intuition - listening

Setting - context

Experience -
from self
& others



8

Contextual questions

- Are Paul and James addressing Christian faith / works in different **settings** - justification before (1) God & (2) man?
- Do they use **terms** (justify, save, works) in different ways?
- How holy, and for how long must a believer be holy, if faith with works are **necessary for eternal life**?
- Is fallen **humanity the final judge** of what constitutes saving faith and works?



9

Possible interpretations

1. Paul and James reflect an unresolvable tension in the early church. (Historical critics)
2. Good works justify and are enabled by faith. (Roman Catholic)
3. Good works and faith are distinct but inseparable. (Many Protestants - John Calvin)
4. **Good works justify us before man and preserve (save) our usefulness in this world.**
Good works are not about justification before God and eternal life but about our usefulness in this life.



10

Private Faith is 1. USELESS.

“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. ... 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is **useless**?”

11

Private Faith is 1. USELESS.

“What use is it”

James is looking at faith in a temporal practical sense.

“if a man says he has faith”

James is looking at the claim to faith (talking the talk).

“but he has no works?”

Think of James’ use of “works” as “deeds” which is the more common meaning.

12

The word “**saved**” in James refers to “eternal life” in some contexts,

James 1:21

“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted which is able to **save your souls**.”

in other contexts
its use seems temporarily focused.

James 5:15

“and the prayer offered in faith will **restore (save)** the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”

13

We can be saved (with respect to heaven) and yet not saved (with respect to this world).

1 Corinthians 3

“¹⁴ If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man’s work is **burned up**, he shall **suffer loss**; but he himself **shall be saved**, yet so as through fire. ¹⁶ Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If any man destroys the temple of God, God will **destroy** him,”

Here we see a person who is “**saved**” spiritually but yet “**suffers loss**” (not saved) in this life.

14

Private Faith is
2. UNSEEN.

“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?**”

Matthew 7:20

“So you shall know them by their fruits.”

15

Private Faith is
2. UNSEEN.

“show me . . . and I will show you”

James is looking at faith as it is seen by man (through action) not by God (who looks at the heart).

NOTE: Human observation is superficial and therefore limited.

“is useless?”

James is looking at faith in terms of usefulness in this life.

16

Matthew 5:16

“Let your light shine **before men** in such a way that they may **see your good works**, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Useful “good works”
are judged by
who gets the glory
& who makes the sacrifice.

17

Private Faith is
3. UNNATURAL

“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?”

Our worldview will be seen in
our response to circumstances
that demand personal sacrifice.

18

"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."

First

Abraham is imputed with righteousness by faith in

Genesis 15:6

- A private declaration
- Paul's point

Later

Abraham's faith is illustrated and affirmed in

Genesis 22

- A public display
- James' point

19

Private Faith is 3. UNNATURAL

"24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."

Is James looking at justification before man, while Paul is looking for it from God?

Romans 4:2-3

"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; **but not before God.** For what does the Scripture say? 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'"

20

Private Faith is 3. UNNATURAL.

"26 For **just as the body without the spirit is dead**, so also faith without works is dead."



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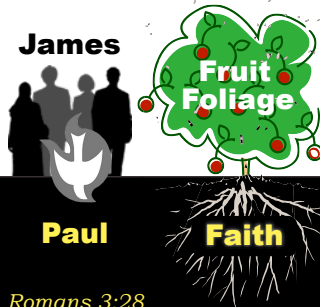
21

James 2:20
"faith without works is useless"

That which is of use in saving us in this life.

James

That which justifies before man.



That which saves us in the life to come.

Paul

That which justifies before God.

Romans 3:28

"a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."

22

"26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

A dead body is useless
until activated by a living spirit.

Ephesians 2:8-10

"For by grace you have been **saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Galatians 5:6

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but **faith working through love.**"

23

"23 and the Scripture was **fulfilled**"

Abraham was reckoned righteous long before he acted righteously.

Colossians 1:25

"Of this church I was **made a minister** according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might **fully carry out (fulfill)** the preaching of the word of God,

Paul was made a minister
for doing ministry
not by doing ministry.

24

What should we learn from this text?

1. The Gospel of Grace, as Paul teaches it, is justification before God **WITHOUT HIDDEN LEGALISM**.
2. The biblical narrative's theme sets the **CONTEXT** for understanding the details in it.
3. To properly understand the Bible, read it through the lens of **APOSTOLIC TEACHING**.
4. The power & authority of the Bible lies in its **MESSAGE**.



25

Hard Questions



26