

# ***The Book of James***

## ***Faith That Works***

Lesson #6 for November 8, 2014

Scriptures: James 2:14-26; Romans 3:27-28; Titus 2:14; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Romans 4:1-5; Joshua 2:1-21.

1. This lesson is about the relationship between faith and works/deeds/actions. How many of us would be willing to have our most private lives spread out before the entire universe? It will happen! At that point, our greatest claims to faith will mean nothing if there are no accompanying works to match them. How do you feel about that?
2. Read James 2:14. In this verse James threw down the gauntlet. As we know, many people have claimed that James and Paul are at odds over faith versus works.
3. Read James 2:15-17; Romans 3:27-28; and Ephesians 2:8-9. It is hard to dismiss the logic of James's argument. Do we really believe that faith works? Does true faith always lead to actions? If we drive past someone in trouble or even someone begging for money, are we in effect saying: "Go in peace, God will provide"? Of course, we all recognize that none of us could begin to meet all the world's needs. So, where do we draw the line?
4. If we review the life of Jesus and especially His ministry, we find that most of the time He was helping one person at a time. (John 3,4) Is that supposed to be a pattern for us? It is interesting to compare James 2:16 and Mark 5:34. When Jesus said to the healed woman, "Go in peace," those words had real meaning!
5. Is it true that when we do something out of love and faith, it makes that love and faith grow stronger? Does that imply that when we ignore an opportunity to do some good for a fellow human, our faith becomes weaker? Of course, James said that kind of faith is already dead!
6. We do not want to come to the conclusion that somehow our good deeds will save us. That also would be a fatal mistake. There is nothing that we can do to earn our salvation.
7. Read James 2:18. How would you respond to James in this verse? Is it true that the only way to have true Christ-like deeds and actions is by developing a faith relationship with Him? If we take a good look at the life of Jesus, do we want to be like Him?
8. Can we separate faith and works? Obviously, many people have tried. Can you think of a situation in which your faith could grow while you were doing nothing? Can you think of a situation in which good works are not a result of faith? Or, would you agree with our Bible study guide suggesting that faith and works are like the two sides of a coin, you cannot have one without the other. Of course, we recognize that one side of the coin is called heads and the other side is what we call tails. In the same way, faith always leads the way; but, actions have to follow.
9. What did Paul really think about works? Read **Romans 2:13**; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Timothy 5:25; and Titus 2:14. **Paul seemed to be suggesting that real faith will cause an "outworking" of good deeds. Paul thought that true faith would lead to works/deeds/action.**
10. How would you compare Jesus's statement in Matthew 5:16? Is it possible for people to see our faith without actions? Read Galatians 2:16. Paul was trying to make the case that **there is nothing wrong with good works; but, they are never the means of salvation.** Do you suppose that Paul as the former quintessential Pharisee understood that point?

If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be

wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.—Ellen G. White, *MS 36 - 1890; Faith and Works*, p. 20.0; 1888 812.2. Compare *RH*, March 11, 1890 par. 13.

11. How would you feel if God gave you a huge long list of good deeds that you had to do in order to be saved? Would that be easier than exercising true faith?
12. Is it really important to know the truth? Does the knowledge of truth make us savable? Read 2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Timothy 2:4; James 5:19-20; 1 Peter 1:22; and 1 John 3:18-19. Clearly, God wants each of us to seek after and to learn and to come to understand the truth. Don't we believe that "to know God is to love Him"? If we get to know God, isn't that at least a major step in the direction of faith?
13. But, there is a warning in James 2:19. Satan and all his associates once knew God very well; but, that did not save them from rebellion. So, what is the relationship between getting to know God, true faith, and actions? Could we end up like the Devil, "knowing" God and still be lost?
14. James decided that the time had come to illustrate his point. Read James 2:21-25 and compare Romans 4:1-5,22-24. Why do you suppose James picked Abraham as his example of faith? And why was Paul using the same illustration about Abraham? Paul made a very significant point in his accounting of the story of Abraham. He pointed out that Abraham was justified by faith *before* he was circumcised. (Romans 4:10) In a time when Christians were having a huge argument about whether it was necessary to be circumcised in order to be a true Christian believer, (Acts 15) this was a very telling argument, especially against Jews who were demanding that everyone become a Jew before he could become a Christian.
15. It is interesting to note that Paul followed up his argument in Romans 4:17-21 with the same illustration of Abraham's faith that James used. Was Abraham's willingness to sacrifice the promised son just a comfortable "belief" in God? Or, did it require real sacrificial action? Compare Romans 4:17 and Hebrews 11:17-19. In Romans 4:21, Paul said that Abraham is the definition of *true faith*. He believed that, if necessary, God could even raise Isaac back from the dead. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets* 154-155.)
16. It is interesting to notice that in Revelation 14:4 which is just a couple of verses before Revelation 14:6-12 which Seventh-day Adventists claim as their key text, John recorded the statement that the people who are faithful and who follow the Lamb at the end of time will follow Him wherever He goes. And where did the Lamb go? He went to the cross. Does that imply that real faith may lead to some very serious action?
17. Read James 2:22 in the *King James Version* or the *New King James Version*. It suggests that by working together with works, faith is thus made perfect. James used the same word for *perfection* that is used in Matthew 5:48. That word really means mature, fully grown, even ripe. If we are to stand through the final events of this earth's history, don't we need a fully mature faith? What did Abraham say to Sarah when they got home?
18. Can you think of an example from your own faith experience with Christianity where works built your faith?
19. Read James 2:25. Compare Joshua 2:1-21; 6:25; Hebrews 11:31; and Matthew 1:5. What do we know about the life of Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho?

All these events were known to the inhabitants of Jericho, and there were many who shared Rahab's conviction, though they refused to obey it.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 492.

20. Was it fair that Rahab and all her family and relatives who got into her small house were saved because she did such a good job of lying? She ended up being an ancestor of Jesus. And she is one of those fantastic women mentioned in Matthew 1 including Tamar, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Why did those women make the “honor roll”?
21. Read James 2:26. Is this a fair evaluation of the relationship between faith and works? Is it really true that if your faith does not work, it is dead? It is certainly true that a body that has no breath is dead. (Compare Hebrews 6:1; 9:14.)
22. Why did James pick Abraham and Rahab as his best two examples of faith? Could he have chosen two apparently more extreme cases—the father of the faithful and a Canaanite female prostitute?

When self is put entirely away, then you can obtain a new and rich experience, you will discern your own imperfections as you lie low at the foot of the cross, and as you view the perfections of Christ, self will sink into insignificance.

Christ will appear to the discerning eye the perfection of attractive loveliness; then His mould will be upon mind and heart, and will be revealed in the character. The impress of the divine mind should be made upon the heart, and manifested in the life. Come to Jesus in your need, pray in living faith, hold fast to the hand of divine power, believe, only believe, and you will see the salvation of God. If you will be taught, God will teach you; if you will be led, He will lead you to fountains of living waters.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Southern Africa*, p. 26.

23. So, what are we to conclude? What is the relationship between faith and works? Do we need to establish some kind of balance between faith and works?

Faith and works are the two oars with which we are to make our way in the Christian life. The Lord calls upon all who think they know what faith is, to be sure that they are not pulling with only one oar, and their little bark going round and round, making no progress at all. **Faith without intelligent works is dead. Faith in the healing power of God will not save unless it is combined with good works.** (MS 86, 1897, p. 12, “Health Reform Principles,” August 25, 1897, from “Sunnyside,” Cooranbong, N.S.W., Australia; 5MR 124.1; GosHealth, January 1, 1898 par. 1; AUCR, October 15, 1905 par. 1; 20MR 8.2) [Bold type is added.]

24. It is great that Abraham and Rahab are our examples of true faith. Did God pick them? But, it is interesting that apart from the original stories, the Bible does not mention the lying of Abraham or Rahab or Abraham's lack of faith in taking Hagar and giving birth to Ishmael. Does that teach us anything about the forgiveness of God as mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31-34 which is, in turn, quoted several times in the New Testament?
25. Now, it is quiz time. Is there a difference between works as an *outward sign* of faith and works as an *outworking* of faith? What is the relationship between faith and love? Read Galatians 3:10. **Is it true that no one who tries to be saved by keeping the law actually succeeds in keeping it?**

26. Many of us have been Christians all our lives and are probably still struggling with the exact relationship between faith and works. This may be partly because of the apparent contrast between Paul and James as mentioned by Martin Luther. Or, could it be that we have not tried hard enough to understand the relationship ourselves?
27. Could one have real *agape* love and still ignore the needs of people around her/him? There is a famous song of the Beatles from many years ago suggesting that “All You Need Is Love.” Is that true?
28. In biblical times, real works from a Jewish point of view meant first of all being circumcised. The Jews had some reasons to believe this. See Genesis 17:10-14 and Exodus 12:48. They also could point to many verses suggesting that to have their sins forgiven, they just needed to offer a lamb at the temple. (See Leviticus 1:4; 4:20,26,35; 5:6; 6:7; etc.) No doubt, they quoted these passages and thought that they had an airtight case for circumcision and traditional sacrifice. But, Paul, the formerly quintessential Pharisee, saw things very differently.
29. And what about us? Do we have any “badges of righteousness”? By carefully observing the Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday and by avoiding things like tobacco, alcohol, and harmful drugs and by living fairly clean, abstemious lives, do we believe we have earned our salvation? Would we dare to say that we are proud of our Seventh-day Adventism?
30. But, we must remember that Abraham, the father of the faithful, had faith and was credited with righteousness *before* he was circumcised. (Romans 4:10) And it was only sometime later that he had the promised son.
31. Could the following passage possibly describe some of us?

The same evil spirit that tempted Christ in the wilderness, and that possessed the maniac of Capernaum, controlled the unbelieving Jews. But with them he assumed an air of piety, seeking to deceive them as to their motives in rejecting the Saviour. Their condition was more hopeless than that of the demoniac, for they felt no need of Christ and were therefore held fast under the power of Satan.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 256.

32. When Jesus chose His 12—11 plus Judas—disciples, do you think any of them had the faintest idea that most of them would end up as martyrs? While Abraham is often cited as a paragon of faith, Jesus was certainly a better One. (See Hebrews 2:10; 5:8-9.) And who could deny the fact that we are supposed to follow Him? (1 Peter 2:21-24; 1 John 2:6)
33. In previous lessons, we have suggested that our relationship with God, sometimes called faith, grows when we allow the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and change us. If the Holy Spirit does that, does it also affect our actions? (Romans 8:13-14; Titus 3:5-8) How do you understand these verses? Paul seemed to clearly believe that what he had to say was the truth. Don't we want to be put right with God in that most important relationship called faith? And don't we believe that faith is ultimately the only requirement for salvation? (See Acts 16:31.) So, what should we do next? How can we grow our faith/works?

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