

James 2:14-26
Show Your Faith by Your Actions

Introduction: How can I know that my faith is genuine? Can others know that my claim to genuine faith is credible?

William Varner points out some important truths: of the 16x “faith” occurs in James, it appears 11x in 2:14-26. Of the 15x “work(s)” occurs in James, it appears 12x in 2:14-26.

Much has been made of the alleged contradictions between James and Paul. As Varner points out, James is not *anti*-Paul (against) but rather *ante*-Paul (before). Granted, it is more than an issue of mere time, but there are differences along with the similarities. It is not either/or.

1) Works/actions naturally spring from genuine saving faith—2:14-17

a) **Necessary questions—2:14-16**

i) **Generally—2:14**

(1) Disconnect: ¹⁴ *What good [o;feloj] (benefit/advantage) is it, my brothers, if (3rd class, probable) someone says/claims he has faith but does not have works/actions?*

(2) Inability: *Can that faith save him?* (Lit. “Is that faith able to save him?”) (Expects a negative answer of No)

(a) Faith that does not affect one’s behavior is superficial and cannot save. (FSB)

(b) It is, as the old saying is, all talk and no walk.

ii) **Specific hypothetical illustration—2:15-16** ¹⁵ *If (3rd class, probable) ...*

(1) The possible desperate situation: *a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,*

(2) The possible calloused response: ¹⁶ *and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body,*

(3) The legitimate question: *what good (benefit/advantage) is that?*

(a) Too often our concern for the welfare of others is a worthless façade. (Donald Burdick) Those who hurt need more than our words.

(b) This agrees with what John wrote in 1 John 3:17-18

b) **The conclusion—2:17 (first of three such statements)**

i) ¹⁷ *So also [ou[twj] faith by [kata,] itself (on its own), if (3rd class, probable) it does not have works/actions, is dead.*

ii) As J. Ronald Blue states, A workless faith is a worthless faith.

2) The essence of genuine saving faith—2:18-26

a) **The demonstration of genuine saving faith—2:18-20**

• Some argue that vv. 18-19 are all part of the imaginary objection.

i) Imaginary objection: ¹⁸ *But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works/actions.”*

- (1) Challenge: **Show** me your faith apart from [cwri,j] your works/actions, and **I will show you my faith by [evk] my works/actions.**
- (2) Comparison—2:19
 - (a) Incomplete: ¹⁹ **You believe that God is one** (the Shema of Deut. 6:4); *you do well.*
 - (b) Inadequate: *Even the demons (fallen angels) believe—and shudder (with fear) [fri,ssw]!*
 - (i) Note their belief in the Most High God (Mark 5:7; Acts 16:16-17)
 - (ii) Note their fear (Mark 1:23-24; 5:7)
 - (c) Believing *that* there is one God (intellectual acknowledgment) is different from believing *in* (εις, into) the God who is one. (Dan McCartney)
- ii) Question: ²⁰ *Do you want to be shown* (lit. “Do you want to know”), *you foolish [keno,j] person, that faith apart from [cwri,j] works/actions [e;rgon] is useless [avrgo,j]?* **(second of three such statements)** (Some MSS read “dead” instead of “useless”)
- b) **Old Testament examples** of genuine saving faith—2:21-25
 - i) **The original Jew Abraham** (Gen. 22)—2:21-24
 - (1) Rhetorical question: ²¹ *Was not Abraham our (Jewish) father justified [aor. pass. dikaio,w] by [evk] works/actions when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?* (Expect a positive answer of Yes)
 - (a) James was calling attention to two ways of justification: by faith before God, and by works before people. While one is justified (declared righteous) before God by faith alone, one is justified (demonstrates his godliness) before people by his or her works. (Moody Bible Commentary)
 - (2) Two completions—2:22-23
 - (a) Faith: ²² *You see that faith was active along with [sunerge,w] his works/actions [e;rgon], and faith was completed [teleio,w] by [evk] his works/actions;*
 - (i) Works/actions are the result of faith.
 - (ii) Faith that is not accompanied by actions is incomplete. That faith can exist without the appropriate accompanying actions is inconceivable to James. (Varner)
 - (b) Scripture: ²³ *and the Scripture was fulfilled [plhro,w] that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted [aor. pass. logi,zomai] to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God (cf. Is. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7).*
 - (3) Conclusion—2:24 (switches back to plural “you”)
 - (a) Positive: ²⁴ *You see that a person is justified [pres. pass. dikaio,w] by [evk] works/actions*
 - (b) Negative: *and not by [evk] faith alone.*

- ii) **The Gentile Rahab** (Josh. 2)—2:25 ²⁵ *And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified [aor. pass. dikaio,w] by [evk] works/actions when ... (she did two things) (Expects a positive answer of Yes)*
 - (1) Welcomed: *she received the messengers*
 - (a) Because of her belief in the God of Israel (Josh. 2:9-13, esp. v. 11)
 - (2) Protected: *and sent them out by another way?*
 - (3) She responded at great personal cost to those at risk.
- c) **The principle** of genuine saving faith—2:26
 - i) Illustration: ²⁶ *For as the body apart from [cwri,j] the spirit is dead,*
 - ii) Principle: *so also faith apart from [cwri,j] works/actions is dead. (third of three such statements)*

3) Things I need to remember:

- a) Genuine faith will eventually cost us something. William MacDonald asks two penetrating questions:
 - i) Am I willing like Abraham to offer the dearest thing in my life to God?
 - ii) Am I willing like Rahab to turn traitor to the world in order to be loyal to Christ?
- b) Remember the sequence in Eph. 2:8-10
- c) We began with the question: can I know that my faith is genuine? Can others know that my claim to genuine faith is credible?
 - i) The answer is Yes!