

**Faith that Works**

9 studies for individuals and groups - Andrew T  
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**James 2: 14-26**

**Just Works**



# Getting the most out of James



Unlike most books of the NT, the letter of James is best known for the people who don't like it e.g., Martin Luther!




It's seen as a scalawag among the obviously Christ-centered letters of Paul and the love-concerned writings of John



People like love. They like Christ. They don't like James.



James is harsh and dogmatic. We feel the sting of his words even today – 'don't be deceived', 'you foolish person', 'you adulterous people', 'now listen'!

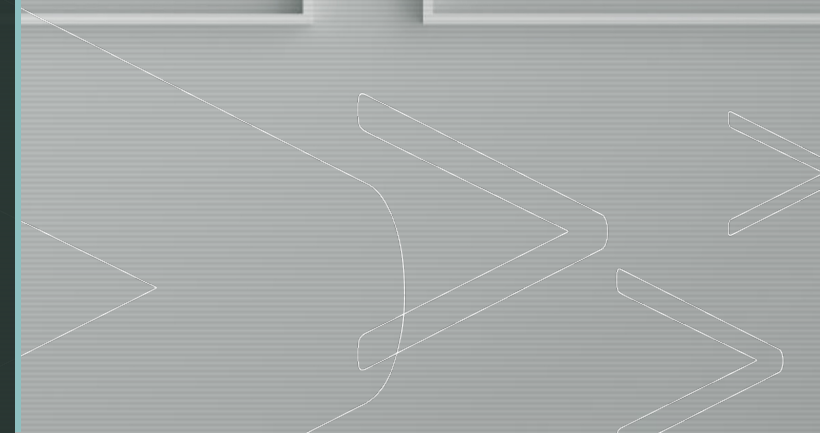


## Why didn't Luther like James?

- Compared to the other letters in the NT, he saw James as being 'full of straw' – empty & hollow
- He virtually relegated it to a 'lesser scripture'
- He believed that it taught 'salvation by works' not salvation by grace alone
- Because of Luther, protestant Christians have tended to ignore James
- It was primarily because of the seeming emphasis on salvation by works in James, that Luther virtually booted this epistle out of his bible.

# Why should we take notice of James?

- The early church saw it as a 'book bearing apostolic authority' – it was most likely written in the early to mid 40s AD, so it's one of the earliest in the canon.
- James speaks a much needed and empowered word – many people assume that James is in direct debate with Paul and that the two are taking opposite positions, but this is not the case at all.
- Because it has been avoided and because it bears the full force of God's word, James is deserving of a special study
- James is practical. He deals with problems. He knows nobody's life is perfect, so he doesn't tell us how to live trouble-free, but how to live when troubles hit.
- He calls for a consistent Christian life and practical faith – being a doer and not just a hearer of The Word





## Expect this study to be difficult ...

- It is not difficult to understand – it will be all too easy to understand!
- Do our words advance God's kingdom. Do they hurt others? Are they truthful, are they loving?
- When money is tight do we withhold it, when others are in need? Do we put more value on earthly things than the things of God?
- In filling our time with the things of the world, do we miss God's will and perspective in our schedule making?
- The context of his letter has meaning today – conflict has entered the churches and they have splintered into 'fighting factions' (ESV) whilst some members have fallen into a "worldly lifestyle"

# So, who was James?

- There are several people in the NT called James including two of the apostles
- Most church scholars believe that a 3<sup>rd</sup> man wrote the letter assigned to James - James the brother of Jesus (see. Matt. 13:55 and Mark 6:3)
- James probably rejected Jesus during his earthly ministry
- Though he certainly started to follow him after his resurrection, as he became the head of the Jerusalem church and led the first church council in Jerusalem (Acts 15)
- He was known in his lifetime as “James the Just” – he was martyred in 62AD



# James 2: 14-26 NIV


“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”



1. Retell in your own words the three stories in this passage which illustrate the interaction between faith and works (vv 15-17, 21-22, 25).

Study Bible Notes ESV

2: 14-26 *Faith Without Works is Dead*

James continues the theme that hearing/faith MUST lead to doing/works. Although it may seem as if James is contradicting Paul's "by grace you have been saved through faith ... not as a result of works" (Eph. 2: 8-9) in reality, there is no contradiction. Paul and James would agree that **the basis of salvation is grace alone** through faith (see Eph. 2:10)

"What good...?" indicates that a negative answer is expected, as does the question, "Can that faith save him?" If someone says he has faith but lacks the evidential works, one must doubt that he has truly been saved. An illustration of what faith without works looks like in every day life is then given – the phrase, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled", is a pious wish and prayer for the welfare of the poor but ***in reality, it is a cop-out***, masking a refusal to help the person in need.



2. In the first story  
James says that faith  
without works is dead.

What opportunities  
do we have to show  
our faith by caring for  
the poor?



### 3. Why is mere intellectual agreement to truth not enough? (v19)

- Many people know the doctrines of Christianity and may even believe them to be true;
- But they may never have made a commitment to Jesus Christ, placing their trust in Him as their saviour and their Lord;
- James emphasizes that TRUE faith is evidenced by works, not that works alone is sufficient or that works and faith in combination save;
- “not by faith alone” he is speaking of the kind of faith that demons possess – mere intellectual assent – which cannot save;
- Faith which is only in the mind is not complete.

## 4. How was Abraham's faith made complete by what he did? (v21-24)

- James offers scriptural proof of what he has been arguing for;
- Abraham was considered righteous in Gen. 22:12 when God says, “now I know that your fear God”;
- In other words, Abraham's decision to follow God and put his trust in Him was so firm that when faced with the greatest of all tests he followed through and resolutely obeyed, whatever the personal cost to him.
- But notice that it is 'works' and not 'work' – James is not thinking of just one deed of Abraham but a long string of obedience starting in Gen. 12:1
- The release of Isaac comes not after one demonstration of obedience, but a lifetime.

ESV Bible Notes – Paul denies that Abraham was 'justified by works' (see Rom. 4:2). James has a different sense of the word 'justify', though both use the same Greek word, dikaiōō. James centres on Abraham's final act of obedience whilst Paul's focus is on God's declaration of Abraham's righteousness.

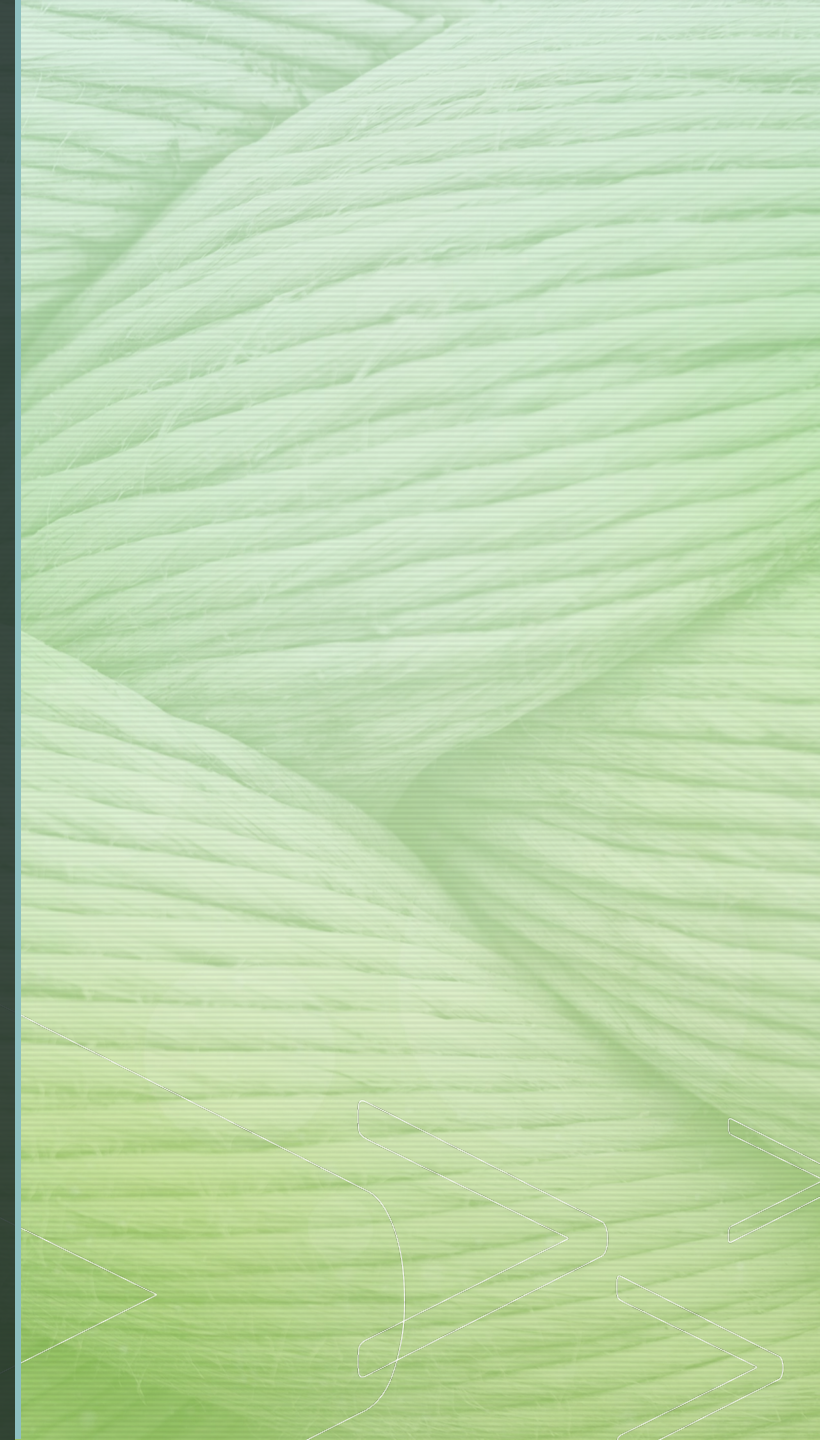
“Even the demons believe, and shudder”. What examples of this can you think of from Jesus’s ministry? Why is it relevant here?

### ESV Bible Notes

God is one – this affirmation of monotheism stems from the core Jewish creed called the Shema (Deut. 6:4), but James stresses its inadequacy.

Since **EVEN** the demons believe this to be true, and they shudder – they intellectually believe it, which shows that mere mental assent to the Christian faith cannot save.

See Mark 1: 21-27



## 8. How does James's closing analogy (v26) summarize his teachings on faith and action?

- “for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works, is dead”
- BUT James also says;
- “a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” – v24
- Paul and James may use the words “faith” and “justification” differently – for Paul it means to be declared righteous but for James it means to validate faith.

ESV Bible Notes – James does NOT disagree that faith alone saves (Rom. 3:28) and completed often means to ‘bring to maturity’. Full grown and genuine faith is seen in the good deeds it produces. For James, ‘faith alone’ is a bogus kind of faith, merely intellectual in its basis.

## 9. James never says that faith without works can save. What does this imply about faith?

- It is easier said than done is a cliché that certainly applies to Christian life;
- It is much easier to talk about God than to obey Him;
- James said that “even the demons believe there is one God”, but that certainly does not make them Christians;
- That’s why people can have all of their doctrine perfectly straight and yet still miss out on God’s will;
- James helps us to stay on target!
- True faith always leads to good works.



## 10. How do you respond when the belief and actions of other Christians are far apart?

- We need to help people to see that what they believe needs to be matched by the way that they live their lives.
- Sometimes it's easier for non-Christians to see where Christians are falling short – has anyone ever said to you, “that’s not very Christian of you?”
- We all have our blind spot and sometimes we can easily fall back into our old ways.
- Many Christians are doctrinally orthodox but fail to be orthodox in the outworking of their faith.
- Their faith is all in their head and not in their actions.

## 11. In what ways do you need to bring your actions more in line with your beliefs?

- James is directing his words to those people whose actions need to come more in line with their stated beliefs.
- He is opening their eyes to themselves – he is holding up the mirror to them.
- He is specifically aiming to address the fallacy that right doctrine and nice words are sufficient.
- Real faith is always indicated by works.
- If there are no works, then the faith is not real. It cannot save.

DATE.



# Bible Study Notes – 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023

- God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac, his only heir. Abraham went forth in faith because he knew that God had promised him many descendants and so believed that God would honour that promise. He stayed obedient right up to the point that he was going to sacrifice his son when God stopped him, seeing his great faith.
- Rahab also believed God 100% and acted accordingly.
- Faith is a personal reaction / deeds are an outward expression of that reaction.
- Prayer is also a good work. Those pious people who have shut themselves away from the world to worship God are doing 'good works' even though others may not see it that way.
- Works are NOT the focus / faith is the focus. Works are the fruit of faith.
- James was addressing scattered Jewish Christians in his letter – they had been tempted towards an intellectual focus and not personal transformation in faith. James was putting them back on the right track.
- 'Intellectual assent' is based on the HEAD not the HEART
- Demons 'shudder' at the thought of God because they know that one day, they will be judged by him and punished. They believe in him but that is not faith!
- Faith cannot be seen nor verified unless it shows itself in good deeds – an outward sign of inward belief.
- Justified in this context means verified or validated – the opposite of 'slavish legalism' – James's readers were not focused on legalism as those were whom Paul was addressing in his letters.