

James Lesson 4 Article

Saving Faith

Verse 24 summarizes the entire matter: faith that does not lead to works is not saving faith. Sad to say, there are multitudes of professing Christians and church members who have this “dead faith.” They profess faith with their lips (v. 14), but their lives deny what they profess. This is the same truth Paul explained when writing to Titus. “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1:16). Real Christians are “a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). This is why Paul warns, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5, NKJV). This does not mean that a true Christian never sins (1 John 1:5–10). But it does mean that a true Christian does not make sinning the habit of his or her life. A true Christian bears fruit for God’s glory and walks so as to please God.

The whole matter of faith and works is summed up in Eph. 2:8–10 (NKJV): (1) the work God does for us (salvation)—“For by grace you have been saved . . . not of works”; (2) the work God does in us (sanctification)—“For we are His workmanship”; (3) the work God does through us (service)—“created . . . for good works.”¹

Faith In Action

The problem is that there is no such thing as inactive faith. Claims that such a thing as mere faith exists are bogus and dangerously self-deceptive. We must understand this not only in terms of James’s argument but also in terms of Paul’s argument in Rom 3:28: “We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” The difference between the two apostles is clear. *For Paul the goal was justification; for James the goal was usefulness.* In the context of Paul’s letter faith must not be allowed to boast in its own works in the judgment (v. 27). In the context of James’s letter faith must not be allowed to boast in self-sufficiency (cf. 2:7; 3:14). For James mere faith was an empty boast that masked great evil. Faith is trust in God alone, but it must be whole-hearted and produce good deeds based on the mercy of God. Faith without deeds is a hoax of the double-minded. It can and surely must be discussed because it is not honest about what it is actually doing, such as playing favorites and withholding mercy. Faith is always active, either producing good deeds in agreement with God or in producing evil deeds in deceptive contradiction of him.²

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament (725–726)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Richardson, K. A. (1997). *Vol. 36: James*. The New American Commentary (136–137). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.