



Faith and Action

James 2:14-26 |

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SUMMARY

Here's a helpful summary from pastor Kent Hughes that helps to show one aspect of how James is trying to illuminate us about the nature of "real faith."

Hughes writes,

Illumination through Rhetorical Questions

James begins his argument with two rhetorical questions which (in the Greek) demand negative answers: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" (v. 14). James seems at first glance to be saying that faith alone does not save, a truth he will again express in verse 24: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

This puts James in apparent contradiction with the Apostle Paul who argues for faith alone in Romans 3:28—"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (NASB) (cf. Romans 4:5; Galatians 3:6-14; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Paul says unequivocally that salvation is *sola fide*, by faith alone. Is this a huge contradiction within the New Testament Scriptures? Martin Luther, who was battling for the Reformation doctrine of salvation through faith alone, thought so, and in the preface to his 1522 edition of the New Testament he called James a "right strawy epistle."

However, there is no real contradiction between James and Paul regarding faith, for Paul's teaching about faith and works focuses on the time before conversion, and James' focus is after conversion. As Douglas Moo has pointed out, "Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works." Paul was fighting against tradition which promoted a false works salvation. James was fighting against a "lite" faith which minimized the necessity of works after coming to Christ. Paul says works cannot bring us to Christ. James says after we come to Christ they are imperative."

Take some time as a group to read through James 2:14-26. Then ask these questions:

1. What stood out to you as you read today?
2. What point does James seem to be making?
3. How does this portion of Scripture connect to what came before? How does it connect to what comes after?
4. What didn't make sense? What do you still wonder about?
5. James wants us to wake up to the reality that "faith lite" just won't do. As Kent Hughes puts it: "Paul says works cannot bring us to Christ. James says after we come to Christ they are imperative." Spend some time today thanking God for this distinction and the fact that Jesus lived the life that you (and !!) should have, died the death we deserve, and makes a way for us to now please God in the ways that James is talking about!