

“What does Faith without Works mean”

All Scripture is KJV: James 2:20

INTRODUCTION: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE HAVE TO SAY?

James 2:20

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

I must say that for a long time during my early understanding of the scriptures, this scripture has been one of those scriptures that stuck with me the most in times past.

1. This scripture is a scripture that kept me asking the question about how are we to serve God, and how are we to remain in his favor?
 2. There are; I am sure many believers who also struggle with the understanding of this verse and perhaps have become despondent in spite of it?
 3. This verse can and has been misused by many who teach that unless you “persevere” in your Christian walk, then you cannot be saved.
 4. So people will try their best to earn their way to heaven by pleasing the Lord by doing good works?
- This verse on the surface seems to be teaching that but of course that is not the case as we shall see shortly. So by studying it you will see that it is not teaching salvation by works.
 - It’s not teaching faith plus works to save you.
 - Let me tell you about a principle when you dealing with scripture.
 - When you find many scriptures teaching very clearly over and over again about a subject and teaching the same thing, and then when you get to the one scripture that seems to be teaching something else. Then what you need to do is look at that verse again, because scripture will never teach against itself. Your understanding will be wrong every time as is the case here with James 2.
 - So therefore it must be talking about something else concerning works?

Because no matter what works we do we cannot be saved at all by works?

Titus 3:5

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

1. There are no works that a person can do to place that person as righteous before God on judgment day. None.
2. But yet there are people who teach that, and there are people who believe that to be the case.
3. That in order for them to gain acceptance into heaven, they need to be holy and live a righteous life to merit salvation or to enter the kingdom of God.

Now let me say this from the outset. That living a righteous life before God, is what the Lord requires for us after salvation, but it is not a requirement for salvation. Otherwise there would be none saved.

- Listen to what Jesus had to say about the requirement to enter into the kingdom of heaven?

Matthew 5:20

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

So according to Jesus your righteousness would have had to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees if you wanted to gain access into heaven?

What Jesus was alluding to and what Jesus was saying to them was, that they were preaching about God, they were telling others how to obey God, but yet they were doing the very opposite to what they were teaching. They pretended to be righteous by the fact that they were teaching righteousness?

Do you see the difference?

Jesus was saying that you yourself were not obeying Gods word to be righteous but yet you were telling and teaching others to do that. But you yourself were not righteous.

- There are many people like this in the world who fall into the trap of acting out righteousness or pretending to be righteous, but yet they themselves are not righteous?
- This is further backed up by the Lord in another reference to the Pharisees as they taught people about God, but yet they themselves were not obeying God.

Matthew 23:2-4 ² Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: ³ All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. ⁴ For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

- We are to understand by the scriptures that there is no man that is worthy of the kingdom of God. (Isaiah 6:6).

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

But as we read James 2, we have to keep in mind that this scripture is an illustration of Genesis 22, where Abraham offers up Isaac, and it is also recorded for us in the NT in Hebrews 11 the faith chapter.

Now as we enter into the book of Hebrews 11 we are confronted by what faith first of all is.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ² For by it the elders obtained a good report. ³ Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, **so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.**

- a) faith is the substance of things hoped for,
- b) the evidence of things not seen.
- c) by it the elders obtained a good report
- d) Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God,
- e) **so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.**

- Faith is a total belief that God created everything that we can see.
- Faith is in the evidence.

Hebrews 11: ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

James 2:21

Was not **Abraham our father justified by works**, when he had **offered Isaac** his son upon the altar? (Genesis 22:10).

- Now we of course believe that salvation is by faith alone, and that not of works.
- So if that is true then how do we explain James 2:20.

Ephesians 2:8-9 **For by grace are ye saved through faith;** and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ **Not of works, lest any man should boast.**

And there are many many verses in the bible that teach salvation is by faith alone and grace alone.

- **Romans 10:13** For whosoever shall **call upon the name** of **the** Lord shall be saved.
 - **John 3:15** ¹⁵ That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
 - **John 3:16** ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
 - **John 1:12** ¹² But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
- ❖ So how then can we explain James 2:20.

It's easy to explain James 2:20, because there are so many scriptures which tell us first of all that salvation is by faith alone, by believing in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

The verses that prove salvation is by faith alone and Gods grace alone is found in very clear passages of scripture over and over again, like the ones I will share with you now.

Romans 3:20

Therefore by the **deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified** in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Galatians 2:16

Knowing that a **man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ**, even **we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified**.

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: **for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth**; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Romans 10:10

For **with the heart man believeth unto righteousness**; and **with the mouth confession is made unto salvation**.

2 Timothy 3:15

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise **unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**.

Hebrews 5:9

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal **salvation unto all them that obey him**;

1 Peter 1:5 Who are **kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:9⁹ **Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls**.

Jude 1:3

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common **salvation**, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly **contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints.

- In Jude 1:3 the bible even uses the word faith as a way of implicating the gospel message that it is required to be received by faith.

So now with that in mind of knowing that it is faith in Jesus Christ that saves, let us go back and review James 2:20. Because we know now that it is faith only that saves as we believe the gospel. And that work has no part to play in salvation.

- ❖ When James writes these verses he is trying to get the message of salvation across to those who were professors of the gospel who said that they believed in Jesus.
- Because there are many people just as in James' day who said that they believed and in fact were not believers but just righteous professors.

1. So in order to find out or to distinguish the true believer James wanted to see a token of their belief in Jesus.
2. He wanted to see whether it was just a label of Christianity or whether they were true believers.

There is no way a person can tell the heart of another man, maybe except by the way they act or react.

- In this instance James was saying that a true Christian who has the fruit to show for his salvation it would therefore be something that others could see and maybe be convinced of their spiritual belief in Jesus and the gospel message.

But even this may not be a true reflection of the person's faith in Jesus. It may be out of a duty or work that he does the things he does.

1. Because the Lord says that we are unable to look upon another man's heart to judge him.
 2. But it is a measure by which a man may use to gauge his own salvation in that if he is being faithful to the Lord. The man may use his work to judge himself but you cannot use it to judge others.
- But what is true James says, is that if a man has not got any works to show, then the chances are he is not serving God.

When we look to the great chapter of the Bible which explains Abraham and his faith we shall look no further than Romans 4. The whole chapter speaks about the faith of Abraham towards God, and how the Lord rewarded Abraham for his faith. Which is the same reward promised to all believers in faith in Jesus of eternal life.

But here in Romans 4 we see how the Lord rewarded Abraham. As well as in Hebrews 11, and James 2 which deal with the faith of Abraham.

But look first of all in James 2:21-

[James 2:21-26.](#)

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

²² Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

²³ And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

²⁴ Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

²⁵ Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

1. Now people who teach faith by works will use verse 24 to justify that salvation needs works added to it to be saved.
2. They will teach that its faith and works that saves.
3. But that's of course not true. Salvation is only by faith and works has no part in it.
4. They misinterpret these verses. So I am going to show you what it is actually saying. And we will use Romans 4 to assist us in its interpretation.

We know that both the book of Romans and James are both Gods word, and we know that the bible is true and without errors, and we know that God will not contradict himself, or else he could not be God? - right?

Romans 4:1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

² For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

- Then Go to James 2:21 and let's take another look. Let's compare scripture.

James 2:21 ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

1. Was Abraham justified by works before God – No.?
2. Does he have a reason to glory? – Yes. And who was he justified before – man.
3. **Romans 3:30 – says** ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight:
4. Therefore man cannot justify himself before God by works.
5. Do works have anything to be justified before God then? – No.
6. But works justify us before man?

So in.....

James 2: 18 ¹⁸ Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

7. This is what mans says in James 2:18, it's not the Lord speaking, its mans opinion.
8. Man can't see your faith; man can't see your heart. Only God can.
9. But works – a man can see that.

- There are no deeds of the law justified in his site – the Lord.
- The deeds of the law are only justified by man. It's what he sees.

There is more. Look at Romans 4.

Romans 4:3-6³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

⁴ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

⁵ But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

⁶ Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.

- ❖ So you see again, over and over again here in Romans 4, not of works, not of works.

Now again look further in Romans 4 in that passage of scripture we see even more evidence of faith being responsible for salvation and not works.

Romans 4:8-12

⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

⁹ Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

¹⁰ How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

¹² And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

❖ **Let me ask you this question?**

- ✓ When did Abraham believe?
- ✓ Was it before he was circumcised or after he was circumcised.
- ❖ Genesis 12 – we see Abram calling upon the Lord by faith.
- ❖ He got saved when he was 75 years old as Genesis 12:4 tells us how old Abram was when he got saved.
- ❖ And in Genesis 12:8 it tells us he got saved by calling upon the name of the Lord.
- ❖ It was only after Abraham was 100 years old was he circumcised.
- **The bible tells us in Joshua 24 verse 2** that up to this point in Abraham's life he was still worshipping other gods and was not saved until we read in Genesis 12:8 where he calls upon the name of the Lord and is saved.

Joshua 24:2 ² And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of **Abraham**, and the father of Nachor: **and they served other gods**.

❖ **When we read in James 2:21** ²¹ **Was not Abraham our father justified by works**, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

1. This event of Abraham wanting to sacrifice his son upon the alter was after Abraham had believed.
 2. Abraham here was well over a 100 years, because he already had a son (a strong lad carry wood he must have been a grown boy at least). So he must have been about 130years old when he wanted to sacrifice his only son.
 3. Abraham believed God before he was circumcised. That was when he was 75 years old (Gen 12:4).
- ✓ So is this verse talking about Abraham's personal salvation? – No its not.
 - ✓ Abraham had been justified by God way before he had offered up his son upon the alter.
 - ✓ Because Abraham was already called a prophet by God before the sacrifice of his son, he was already doing great things for God, so how ridiculous is it that he must have been saved here by his works in James 2:21. It makes no sense.

And in James 2: ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

1. Here we see the scripture being fulfilled which God had promised to Abraham back in Genesis 15, that he would make a great nation in him.
2. So this is the fulfillment of the OT in Genesis 15, it's not that he got saved here in James 2:21.
3. So if you here today and you got saved, that means you called upon the name of the Lord and got saved. That's how you get saved.

You see Abraham was already saved, but when he sacrificed his son upon the alter, that was when he was justified by man, because of the works which he showed.

4. Because until that time, just building an alter unto God was nothing, but sacrificing you son was a big deal, and that's when man justified him before them because of the faith that he had and carryout that command by the Lord.
- ❖ That's why whenever God wants to talk about faith, he uses Abraham as our example.

PRAYER.....CLOSE