

## James 2:20-26

**Titus 1:16 (NKJV)** summarizes the warning that James is expressing in **James 2:14-26**. “*They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*” (**Titus 1:16**)

Paul wrote in **Romans 3:28**, “*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*” James wrote in **James 2:24**, “*You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*”

### Summary:

- Paul is saying that salvation is by grace of God through faith and not by keeping the law, which would be works
- James is saying salvation is by grace through faith evidenced by works

Jesus said in **Matthew 7:21**, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*” Jesus is saying not everyone who calls me Master has made me “Master” of their life, and they are self-deceived; if they had made me Master of their life they would be serving me.

### **I. An Explanation (Vs. 20)**

**James 2:20** translation from the original Greek reads like this, “*Are you willing to recognize, O delusional man, that faith without works is useless, (empty, inoperative, or worthless.)*” From the text James is saying that the faith that is not evidenced by good works is useless because it is dead. The meaning is, a useless, dead faith is not saving faith.

A person with useless dead faith may say the right things, but talk without action makes a mockery of genuine faith. James gives an example of that mockery in the **James 2:15-16**, “<sup>15</sup> *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*”

Jesus is speaking about how those in the end days who truly know Him will be revealed or evidenced- notice that it will be by their works. **Matthew 25:34-36**, “<sup>34</sup> *Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:’* <sup>35</sup> *for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;’* <sup>36</sup> *I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’*”

Paul and James do not disagree, Paul writes about works, **1 Corinthians 3:13**, “*each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.*” **Ephesians 2:10**, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, [not by good works] which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*” **Galatians 5:6b**, “*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through [acts of] love [works].*”

### **II. Two Illustrations (Vs. 21-25)**

James proceeds to illustrate what he is teaching by using two opposite characters from Israel’s history – Abraham and Rahab.

- Abraham was a Jew
- Rahab was a Gentile
- Abraham was a godly man
- Rahab was a sinful woman
- Abraham was called “the friend of God”
- Rahab was a Canaanite, a people marked by God for destruction because of their centuries of ungodliness

Both Abraham and Rahab illustrate saving faith – faith evidenced by works.

#### **A. Abraham (Vs. 21-24)**

The Greek word translated “justified” (*dikaioo*) means to vindicate (show to be correct). Abraham’s salvation was vindicated by his works – specifically the work of being willing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice on the altar. James was not speaking of Abraham’s salvation. James speaks of Abraham’s salvation in verse 23. He’s quoting **Genesis 15:4-6**

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The word translated “counted” in vs. 23 is a legal and financial term. Abraham’s righteousness bank account was empty. But when he responded to God’s promise with faith, his righteousness account was filled up with the righteousness given by God that would be earned by Christ years later on the cross.

**Vs. 22** – “...by works faith was made perfect.” The words “made perfect” means to bring to maturity. As our faith leads to works of obedience, our faith deepens and matures. Faith and works don’t mix in the attainment of salvation, but faith and works must occur together to bring spiritual maturity into our lives.

*“So Paul and James agree. In God’s court, believers are justified at the moment they believe. When they trust in Christ as Lord and Savior, their sin is laid on Christ and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to them. Yet works also justify in this secondary sense: they vindicate God’s declaration that we are right with Him. They prove that we are alive in Christ.”*  
[Daniel Doriani]

\* Our greatest testimony of being justified by faith alone in Christ alone is a life of obedient works flowing out of a heart of gratitude to the one who has saved us by His grace apart from our works. **1 Corinthians 3:13**, “<sup>13</sup> each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup> If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss ...”

### B. Rahab (Vs. 25)

In his next illustration, James moves from a patriarch to a prostitute. **Joshua 2:9-11**, “<sup>9</sup> and said to the men: ‘I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. <sup>10</sup> For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. <sup>11</sup> And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.’”

Rahab evidenced genuine faith by hiding the spies, helping them escape and by asking them to spare her family. God was so pleased with Rahab’s faith that He put her in the lineage of Christ. In Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus, he starts with Abraham in **Matthew 1:2**. Starting in **Matthew 1:5-6a (NKJV)** “<sup>5</sup> Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, <sup>6</sup> and Jesse begot David the king.”

### III. An Application (Vs. 26)

James is saying that faith and works are as vital to one another in the spiritual realm as the body and the spirit are to one another in the natural realm. A professed faith without evidencing, validating works of obedience is not saving faith.

#### Application:

What are the ongoing evidences in my life that clearly exhibit my faith by my works?

If evidence is lacking, what are the first steps I must take to remedy my situation (salvation, repentance, rededication of my life to service, other steps)?