

# Action Figures

## James 2:18-24

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#### I. Dead vs. 17-18

- a. Faith
  - i. Faith - as true piety, genuine devotion *faith* as fidelity to Christian teaching
  - ii. Works of the deeds of humans, exhibiting a consistent moral character, context good or bad
    - 1. Dead- **to being so morally or spiritually deficient as to be in effect dead, *dead***
    - 2. Later wisdom and understanding are said to be demonstrable along these lines (3:13). But a lifeless faith cannot be shown to be alive. The claim of faith is empty where there is no action, and thus no proof of faith is possible.
    - 3. It thus comes about that the word ἔργον, already suspect in the OT, acquires in Paul a completely negative sense whenever it is a matter of human achievement. For the work of man cannot stand before the exclusive operation of grace.
- b. Someone
  - i. I will Show
    - 1. Show- **to prove or make clear by evidence or reasoning, *explain, prove***
    - 2. meaning “prove to me.” “Prove to me this (so-called) faith of yours apart from deeds.” It is obviously impossible, for the reality of faith can only be seen in life-style. So Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 claimed that faith needs love. “I,” continues James, using the emphatic ἐγώ, “will demonstrate my faith by my works.

#### II. Useless vs. 19-20

- a. God is one - Only those who are keeping the “royal law” of neighbor love can be said to be active in “well doing” (v. 8). Whether this mention of the oneness of God is a direct reference to Old Testament faith here (“The LORD is one,” Deut 6:4; the “Shema” or “Hear, O Israel”) or a more general monotheistic confession rooted in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:4–6), James was unambiguous about the paltry faith of which they boasted.
- b. Demons

- i. The demons also have monotheistic belief. They know of the reality of God, but they are still malevolent. Many believe that which is true about the Deity, but orthodoxy may have no effect on the evil activities of their lives. The only effect on the demons is that they “shudder” at the thought of God’s existence and his power over them. If believers do not fear the Lord, they will have to realize that even these few words of great truth—the confession of God’s oneness—can be part of the perversity of mere words that only puff us up and cause great evil (cf. Jas 1:22; 3:5).
- ii. The confession is in accordance with true belief, so James adds a semi-ironic καλῶς ποιεῖς (the author certainly believed this truth with all his heart, following the tradition of Jesus, Mk. 12:29). Such belief is indeed necessary, but not enough for salvation. The demons themselves are quite orthodox, but they tremble in fear of judgment. That all things, including demons, shudder (φρίσσω) before God is clear in Jewish literature
- iii. The point is that the knowledge of who God is does not save them; in fact, it is this very knowledge which makes them shudder (and that very name which was used by exorcists to drive them out)! A faith which cannot go beyond this level is worse than useless
- c. Recognize - **to grasp the significance or meaning**
  - i. Useless - **to being unproductive, *useless, worthless***

### III. Perfected vs. 21 -23

- a. Abraham
  - i. Abraham - Much in the passage accords with themes central to James’s message, such as enduring trials as God’s testing of faith (1:2–4), which is the way in which God induces deeds. These deeds of trusting and humble obedience demonstrate the evidence of genuine faith. Indeed, Heb 12:1–13 exhorts believers to accept this testing from God as evidence that they are true sons of God and—from James’s perspective—of Abraham as well. Abraham’s act was useful then to God by which Abraham became the first proven son of his mercy
    - 1. God regarded Abraham as righteous for offering up his son Isaac (cf. Gen 22:1–18; although Abraham was counted as righteous first in Gen 15:6).
    - 2. James probably had absorbed the new teaching that began with John the Baptist: “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham” (Matt 3:8–9).
  - ii. Perfected –

1. James wanted it known that without action, faith cannot be complete. Without action there will be no perseverance (cf. 1:3), and without sustained perseverance faith will not become complete. There is an important connection between deeds that complete faith and perseverance itself. Abraham's actions were his perseverance in faith. Perseverance completes faith by demonstrating the genuineness of faith (cf. 4:10–11). Thus, although usefulness is a standard by which faith is measured, so is perseverance through testing. Perseverance, of course, is connected to the former standard because it is "useful" to God and the believer in that it demonstrates true relationship.
  2. Their necessity may be the stress, but James turns right around and states that Abraham's faith is perfected (ἐτελειώθη, doubtless meaning "is brought to maturity" and thus indicating the unfinished state of faith without works) through his works is the discoverer that God is one).
- iii. Justified - of God *be found in the right*
1. This simple faith is the point of entry "into Christ." But for James the overarching concern was with demonstration. Given that so much can be done within the church out of "bad faith," what is meant by "faith" must be clarified by deeds.
  2. The point of James's argument, then, has nothing to do with a forensic declaration of justification; the argument is simply that Abraham did have faith, which here unlike other places in James means monotheistic belief—for this Abraham was famous in Jewish tradition—but he also had deeds flowing from that faith. His faith was not just "saying," but "saying and doing." He had responded to the "implanted word"
  3. These data mean that neither the works which James cites nor the justification which results are related to Paul. Rather, the works are deeds of mercy (which therefore fit with the opening verses of this section) and the ἐδικαιώθη refers not to a forensic act in which a sinner is declared acquitted (as in Paul), but to a declaration by God that a person is righteous, *ṣaddîq* (which is the implication of the "Now I know" formula of 22:12;
  4. 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.

- b. Perfected- **to overcome or supplant an imperfect state of things by one that is free fr. objection, *bring to an end, bring to its goal/accomplishment***