

Work it Out

James 2:18-23

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A. Know and Do (v. 18):

1. I have faith – Someone may continuously hold the position that they have of a deep commitment and intense trust in God’s Word. This is because the believer is confident that God has the ability and authority to resolve whatever the believer is experiencing.

a) The emphasis is not on the true nature of faith but on the false claim of faith. It is the spurious boast of faith that James condemned. Such “faith” does no “good”; there is no “profit” (*ophelos*, used in the NT only here and in v. 16; 1 Cor. 15:32). It is worthless because it is all talk with no walk. It is only a habitual empty boast (“claims” is in the present tense). Can such faith save him? A negative answer is anticipated in the Greek. Merely claiming to have faith is not enough. Genuine faith is evidenced by works.^[1]

2. I have works - Someone may continuously hold the position that they have continuously demonstrated that their actions, unrelated to their commitment to Christ, is good and profitable for their walk with God and how they impact the development of the church. They do good things but it is not completely attached to a constant reflection and application of God’s Word.

3. Show me – James commands the believers he is addressing to exhibit in a significant manner of faith. This is because in the midst of trials and difficulties they prove their faith to hearers not doers (James 1:21-25). They blamed God for their failures rather than recognizing that God doesn't tempt anyone (James 1:12-16).

a) The implied answer to the last question of 2:14 is no. James allowed no special pleading. He was also not concerned with a theological discussion of faith. Rather, he was concerned with its practical aspects. Faith without works has no use for others, illustrated in 2:15–16 (“useless,” 2:20; “worthless,” 1:26).

4. Your faith without the works – James challenges these believers to stop behaving as the Pharisees and Jewish leaders did; they had a lot of knowledge of the scriptures and even though they knew who Jesus was (John 5:39) they still nailed Him to the cross. Knowledge alone can lead to arrogance because without obedience it does not change the heart (1 Corinthians 8:1-2; 1 John 2:3-6).

5. Your faith without the works – James is challenging these believers whose behavior contradicts their claim of faith. He is saying “how can you be deeply committed to God’s Word and it somehow never affects the decisions you make or produces spiritual maturity?”

6. I will show my faith – James states that the true representation of faith is always manifested by works. This is because the nature of faith is that it is a full surrender to God’s Word due to a complete trust in Him. Since God’s Word is instructing us to action, it is impossible for it to not require obedience.

B. Don't Become Useless (vs. 19-20):

1. You believe – This is a faith that is a result of an unreserved wholehearted commitment to God- believing God to be the one and only God and His Word to be true. When there are conflicting beliefs (Jews were no longer in Jerusalem and are in countries that had their own gods and beliefs) surrounding them, their deep conviction is going to be tested.

2. God is one – The focal point of their conviction is that God is always one.

3. Do well – The conviction that God is one is a repeated action which is excellent because it meets the intended purpose.

4. Demons also believe - There are evil spirits who hold to the same conviction as believers. I believe that the use of the word believe here seems to imply that they can provide a factual account that God is one.

a) Demons know that Jesus is alive, they know all about His power and they know what the church is supposed to be about,. They also know that Christ lives in our lives, but it never stops them from trying to infiltrate the church, does not stop Satan from testing Jesus, and did not stop them from opposing Christ while He was on earth, even though they are scared of Christ. So it is with those people who believe in Christ, scared that He can cause them suffering if they do wrong, t wanting to come to church for the same reason they enjoyed the world (looking for a fix, get high on music), with no intention of changing. Their faith is dead -- demonic faith.

5. Shudder; tremble – The fact that demons continuously, because of this fact, show physical signs of terror, extreme fear and horror but are still demonic means that they have knowledge but knowledge alone does not make a difference.

6. Are you willing – James seems to imply the persons he is talking to stubbornly hold that they believe that faith without works can take place; this is in view with 2:1-7.
7. Recognize; Knows – James poses the question as to whether or not they are willing to come to the full realization based on a better understanding, through the influence of the Holy Spirit that faith is always followed by works?
8. Foolish; vain – James calls this person who seems to be unwilling to accept what he is saying to be a person who has an absence of good and a presence of evil.
9. Your faith without the works – To have a deep conviction and full surrender to God's Word and not have a willingness to obey it makes faith of no benefit to the spiritual development of a believer (Ephesians 3:16-21).
10. Useless; benefit – To have faith alone does not stimulate the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life (John 15:1-17; Romans 12:1-2). The believer bears no fruit.
11. Useless; benefit – Without faith that produces works a believer cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). Their faith is therefore useless.

C. Become a Friend of God (vs. 21; John 15:1-7, 13):

1. Justified by works - Abraham's relationship with the Lord was restored in its rightful place because he believed what the Lord told him and put a lot of energy into obeying God.
2. Offered up Isaac his son – Abraham's obedience was so genuine and complete that when God told him to sacrifice his only son, that he waited for 25 years for, Abraham still obeyed God whether he understood "why" or not.

a) Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22) is naturally highlighted as the pinnacle of his devout obedience. Philo claims that Abraham's offering of Isaac was the greatest of Abraham's "works" (*Abraham* 167).^[2]

3. Justified by works when he offered - The depth of Abraham's commitment to the Lord was fully revealed when God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son that it took twenty five years to have. This act is faith at work.

4. Justified by works when he offered - Abraham, unlike demons, had a full knowledge of all that God expects him to do but also viewed what God said as something he must obey to please God's expectations.

5. You see – Abraham's actions require our earnest contemplation because it creates an awareness of what true faith looks like.

6. Faith was working – Abraham's intense trust in God led to his steadfast commitment to totally surrender to the Lord's divine will. This confident trust in God moved Abraham to exert a lot of energy in fully completing all God told him to do.

7. Working with his works – His deep conviction and full surrender creates a desire to remain steadfast in completing all that God told him to do. There is no stopping until what God told him to do is done.

8. As a result of works - Abraham's full surrender to God caused him to be completely possessed about completing whatever God told him to do.

9. Faith was perfected, fulfilled, completed – Abraham's steadfast obedience and complete surrender, which was demonstrated when he offered up Isaac, demonstrates

that his faith in God is totally what it needs to be so that from this point forward Abraham is going to do whatever is right in God's sight.

10. The scripture was fulfilled – The totality of the sacred writings of the Word of God was complete when it referenced the righteousness of Abraham.

11. Says – The complete revelation of scripture continuously verbalizes the righteousness of Abraham.

12. Believe – Abraham had an undeserved deep commitment to fully trust God and that is why careful reflection needs to be provided concerning Abraham's relationship with the Lord.

13. Righteousness – Because Abraham was willing to do whatever God instructed him to do, no matter the sacrifice, with a full surrender to all of God's Word, his life functioned in conformity to the standards of God's Word. This is why Abraham was a righteous man.

14. He was called friend – Abraham, once and for all, had a divine call upon his life to holiness. His life would be sober in a world filled with vile people and worldly attractions (Philippians 2:14-18). This set Abraham apart as consecrated to God. This is why he would be considered as a man who was loyal to God, and willing to sacrifice his life for God (John 15:13).

^[1] Blue, J. R. (1985). James. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 825). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^[2] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*](#). (Vol. 4, p. 102). Zondervan.