



VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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STUDY 25: SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF WORKS AND FAITH

James 2:14-26

This passage has often been misunderstood by many preachers who think that James is opposed to the doctrine of justification by faith. Some ministers do not seem to understand that this section of Scripture is equally inspired of God as the Epistles written by Paul the Apostle. They count James and Paul as expressing opposing views or contradictory doctrines. They insist that Paul emphasised being saved by faith without works, and that James emphasised that faith without works cannot save anyone. As a consequence, they neglect this scripture to their damage.

Careful study and proper understanding will reveal that Paul and James are in wonderful agreement and balance. They show us the two sides of the same coin. Paul taught that works before salvation have no value. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Yet even Paul stressed the necessity of good works after salvation to prove that the salvation is genuine and real (Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17). James speaks to those who profess to be saved and he says that they should prove their testimony by their conduct, lifestyle or works. Paul says come just as you are, and receive forgiveness and salvation by faith. Both Paul and James say, after receiving salvation by faith, the evidence of a truly saving faith is good works and Christian character.

Works in this context is synonymous with fruits (i.e. evidence of salvation) – and therefore can be used interchangeably. Just as the quality of a tree is known by its fruits, equally the quality of faith is known by its works.

1. DEADNESS OF FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

James 2:14-20,26; Matthew 7:21-23; Titus 1:16; Luke 6:46; 1 Corinthians 13:2; John 2:23-25; 8:30,31; 12:42,43

Repeatedly, James impresses it upon all that "**faith without works is dead**" (James 2:17,20,26). Indeed, this is the clear teaching of Scripture and the uniform teaching of Christ, Paul, Peter and others (Matthew 7:17-20; 3:8; Ephesians 4:21,22; 2 Peter 1:5-11). True saving faith brings transformation to our hearts and lives. Faith which does not bring a change of life is mere intellectual belief and it is barren, dead and fruitless. Even demons believe in the existence and might of God and they tremble. Their faith does not save or change them. Those who profess to be Christians but deviate in their practices from the requirements of the Scriptures are not different from the devils. All Scripture affirms that genuine faith produces good fruit.

Faith without works, good deeds or character fruit is dead. Those who profess such faith are like trees with much leaves but with no fruit. Such trees are dead and will be cut down and thrown into the fire. Profession without corresponding practice is worthless. Some deceivers who profess to believe in Christ and claim

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to be eternally secured but who are living in sin, and who bear no fruit of righteousness, possess only dead faith. Such empty talkers will be disappointed and damned eternally. Dead faith cannot link us with the living God.

2. DECEPTION OF WORKS WITHOUT FAITH

James 2:18; 2 Timothy 3:5; 1 Corinthians 13:3; Matthew 5:20; 23:23-28; Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16; 3:10,11; Titus 3:4,5; Ephesians 2:8-10.

If there are many who go about with dead faith without works, there are multitudes who flood the churches with dead works without faith. Like the Pharisees, they substitute true righteousness which only comes through faith in Christ with their own self-righteousness, which the Bible describes as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). All our works or deeds before coming to Christ are merely self-righteous acts which cannot save the soul. So-called good works without faith in Christ are deceptive. Like Nicodemus (John 3:1-3) it has the tendency of creating a false impression that one is busy for God, when there is no record in heaven of such services. The rich young ruler thought that his testimony "Master, all these have I observed from my youth" (Mark 10:20) would grant him eternal life. But no, he went away from Christ, sorrowful, lost and damned. Before Paul had living, saving faith in Christ, he said, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:6). Yet, that availed nothing, it could not save him from sin, he was still the chief of sinners.

Many are deceived, thinking they are on their way to heaven when in reality they are on their way to hell. Many, like the foolish virgins will realize too late when they wake up in the everlasting burnings without a chance to repent, believe and be saved. Humanly generated fruit without faith in Christ is deceptive.

3. DEMAND FOR WORKS OF FAITH

James 2:21-26; 1 Timothy 1:5; Galatians 5:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Titus 3: 8; Hebrews 11:7,8,17,31; 2 Peter 1:5; Matthew 5:16; Titus 2:11-14

Fruit must accompany faith for the faith to be genuine and acceptable. True, saving faith produces good fruits, good works or real Christian character. Here is the test of scriptural faith in Christ. If you truly believe in Christ, there will be a transformation of life. If Christ lives in you, He will produce the appropriate character fruit in you. This is the sure evidence that you know Christ. that you are saved and that your sins have been forgiven. Godliness in the life is the evidence that Christ lives in the heart.

It is necessary for each of us to examine himself. Does your faith practice match your profession? Do you have the evidence that your faith is alive and active or is it dead? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you have saving faith? Does your character of good works show that your faith is genuine, and not fake? Can your neighbours testify that you live such a life that convinces them that you are saved? What do you have? Faith without fruit? Fruit without faith? Faith with fruit? Be not deceived; faith without works is dead. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).