



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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Lesson 5

James 2:14-26 Commentary New American Standard Bible

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

(James 2:14) What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as truly “our Lord,” “our King,” “our Leader,” benefits us and should also benefit others. If someone claims to have faith in Jesus, but a faith in Jesus that does not benefit others, he does not have true faith and his faith does not benefit anyone—not even himself. True faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and true love for God and others go together as two sides of a coin. It is impossible to have a physical coin with only one side; likewise, it is impossible to have true faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ without true love for God and others. One type of faith that cannot save you is faith that does not love God and others and does not seek to obey God and serve others in the name and power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus said in John 14:23, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” Our faith in and our love for Jesus Christ and our obedience to His words indicate that the Father and the Son have made their home with us and we have true faith—a faith that benefits everyone.

(James 2:15) If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

The Apostle Paul wrote, “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints” (Ephesians 1:15). True faith in Jesus as Lord results in “love toward all the saints” (that is, “all Christians,” “all God has set apart for holy service to God and others”). Works of faith express our love for God and others, and our desire to truly follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Whenever true Christians see a brother or sister in Christ who needs clothing or food or has other needs, Jesus has a plan for His followers to meet their needs. In faith, His followers will seek to follow His plans to benefit others, and in small ways compared to Jesus as The Way, Jesus’ followers will be channels of His saving love, grace, and mercy that flow through them to serve others.

(James 2:16) and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

A person who says they are a Christian but are not truly a Christian or a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ might say to a needy person, “Just believe in Jesus and you will be all right. Jesus will meet all of your needs,” and then do nothing to help the person in need. James showed how unreasonable it is to say to a needy brother or sister in Christ, “keep warm and eat your fill,” when they have no clothes or food. A true faith in Jesus Christ will lead a true Christian to respond reasonably in love when they see someone in need. They will pray for the Lord’s help to do whatever they wisely can. A reasonable response in love might also include the Apostle Paul’s statement to someone who appears to need help: “We gave you this command: ‘Anyone unwilling to work should not eat’” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). When faced with decisions on how best to help someone, a follower of Jesus Christ can prayerfully try to live by and be guided by the Holy Spirit who lives within them, as Paul wrote in Galatians 5:25, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.” Paul’s command might also apply to the person who says he has faith in Jesus Christ but will not do good works to help those in need as the Holy Spirit tries to lead them.

(James 2:17) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

One definition of faith is mere “intellectual belief,” and this definition seems like the definition of faith that James is using. For example, most people have faith as an “intellectual belief” that the earth is round, but most people do not live daily with this belief as a part of their consciousness, and they do not make conscious decisions daily based on this fact. Before getting out of bed in the morning, few people say, “I must remember that my bed is on a round earth; I must do everything today in the right way because the earth is round, especially when I get ready for breakfast and go to work and do my job today.” In some sense the “intellectual belief” that the earth is round is a dead faith for most people; they do not think much about it. For part of the day, when astronauts are in space, they do make decisions based on the fact that the earth is round, so their faith is not merely intellectual or a dead faith. They and others do works of navigation based on their faith and observation that the earth is round. Likewise, Christians need to make decisions prayerfully and they need to live daily with the conscious commitment that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior according to the Scriptures; therefore, they want to do His will—this type of faith is not by itself or dead.

(James 2:18) But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith

without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

Mere intellectual belief without ever making choices and taking actions based on that belief does nothing to help anyone or show anyone anything about that belief.

Intellectual belief without good choices and helpful actions based on true faith in Jesus will do harm by sins of commission or sins of omission. True faith in Jesus Christ will include intellectual belief that corresponds to reality, to what is, to sound biblical teaching; for example, that God exists, that God created people in His image, that God is love and light, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that the Holy Spirit indwells Christians to guide them, and other truths. Our choices and works reveal our intellectual beliefs and our true commitments.

Consistently wrong choices can indicate a wrong intellectual belief or a misplaced trust, no matter how much a person may say they are a Christian. Doing good works in the name of Jesus Christ will show others our faith truly rests in and is guided by Jesus, who lives within us.

(James 2:19) You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

God is one; that is reality; that fact is true; that is the way God is as one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When a person's faith regarding the true God is

merely an intellectual belief that the truth will have no effect on the person's daily choices and behavior. Demons know that God is One in Three Persons, and despite that knowledge they shudder at the thought because of their choices and actions and they will not repent. Some with a faith that is mere intellectual belief have far less faith than demons, and they should shudder and repent.

(James 2:20) But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

Some have thought that all they have needed to do was express and maintain mere intellectual belief in some facts about Jesus to be right with God forever, even though their faith has never shown that Jesus is Lord of their lives.

James would have called a person who believed this “senseless” or without reason and commonsense. Their faith is barren and does not produce the fruits or gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul wrote: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.” Those with true faith in Jesus Christ results in the Holy Spirit bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

(James 2:21) Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

When a person makes choices and takes actions consistent with the revealed will of God and the Bible, the Word of God written, they are justified in their actions and right with God in their choices. God revealed to Abraham that He wanted him to offer Isaac on an altar. God's request and Abraham's decision to obey God showed his faith in God, and God saved Isaac from death. Because Abraham believed in the true God, he believed God and did what God told him to do; therefore, James said, "Abraham was justified by works;" his works showed he had the right kind of faith in God as his Lord, a Lord to be obeyed and not just believed to exist; a God one should "believe and trust," not just "believe in."

(James 2:22) You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

Faith that is merely intellectual belief in God's existence is dead, such a limited faith is without life and inactive. True faith in Jesus Christ as Lord over all of existence and Lord over your own life too will produce works that flow from love for God and others. When true faith achieves God's purpose in daily activity and reasonable choices, that faith is "brought to completion by works." Our works do not save us, and we do not perform works of faith to save us—Jesus Christ saves us through His sacrificial death on the cross in our behalf. His work saves us and leads us to love and serve Him with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(James 2:23) and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God.

“Abraham believed” means more than he intellectually concluded that God exists. Abraham believed and his trust in God led him to obey God; therefore, Abraham remained right with God. Abraham did not use his belief in the existence of God as an excuse to do whatever he pleased without regard to the consequences in relation to God. Through faith, Abraham so cherished his relationship with God that he was the friend of God. True faith in Jesus Christ always leads to a mutual friendship with Jesus Christ.

(James 2:24) You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Works of love flow from God’s love that He has poured into the hearts of all who believe Him. Through faith in Jesus Christ and love for God and others, Christians see what good works need to be done to help others and achieve God’s purpose—and they do these works. Those without clothing and food will receive clothing and food from those who respond in faith when God shows them how best to serve those in need (often on a case by case basis). When Christians take the actions God asks of them, they remain right with God and in a right relationship with

God. They do things for God because they know Jesus Christ is their King and their Friend.

Remember what Jesus promised in John 15:14-16, “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.”

(James 2:25) In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Works without love, works that only obey the law with the hope of earning credit and rewards from God, works that are efforts to do more good deeds than bad deeds so you can go to heaven, are not the works James commended or commanded. From observing her actions, the Holy Spirit inspired James to understand that Rahab had come to believe in the true God and she wanted to obey and serve God no matter what the danger might be to her. She had come to love God and His people; therefore, when God inspired her or told her to save the messengers she acted in faith and saved them. God had forgiven her for her sins

because of her faith in Him, and by her obedience from love she remained right with God, even though she had not yet been taught the law of Moses. She was saved by God's grace through her faith, a faith that led her to do God's saving work.

(James 2:26) For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

For a human body to remain alive it must remain indwelt by a human spirit—the spirit that goes to its place when the body dies. True Christian faith includes right belief, right teaching, belief that the Bible is true as the true Word of God written, but this remains a dead faith if it is not accompanied by following Jesus and obeying God day by day because we love God, His Word written, and others.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What type of love should true faith in Jesus Christ inspire within true believers?
2. According to James, what unreasonable or senseless response does the person who says he has faith, but has no works, give to the hungry person who has no food?
3. If someone's faith is nothing more than intellectual belief, how might that make a difference in the way they live? Can you think of some examples?

4. Hebrews 11 describes faith: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). What did this assurance and conviction of some of those listed in Hebrews 11 lead them to do?
5. How is faith brought to completion by works?

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