

October 1, 2006 AM

**A FAITH THAT JUSTIFIES
GENESIS 15.6 IN JAMES 2**

Summary: *A faith that does not conform a person's lifestyle to the word of God as revealed in Christ, no matter how orthodox it sounds, is a dead faith and unable to save. Saving faith is a faith that reveals itself in good works. Abraham's faith is an example of saving faith.*

WHAT IS JAMES ABOUT?

Purpose: *to deal with Christians who are being persecuted and finding themselves wanting to compromise the faith in order to make life easier or respond with violent wrath in order to bring in God's purposes.*

Wrath of man does not bring righteousness of God (1.19-20). Must listen to the word and do works of mercy (1.21-27).

Don't show partiality to the rich and despise the poor (2.1-10). Rich = the establishment Jews at the time. They blaspheme that honorable/good name which was called over these Christians (2.7). This is early Acts persecution.

Temptation: compromise the faith by making unholy alliances with these people (cf. 4.1ff.)

They must endure trials and persecution when it comes for the sake of obeying King Jesus and his royal Law (2.8). This royal law of liberty (1.25) has great affinity with Matthews gospel.

Teachers may also be inflaming the people to violence (3.1-18). The people need to humble themselves before God and he will lift them up in time; i.e., he will vindicate them properly (4.10)

They must be patient and persevere through the suffering (5.7-12), responding to various situations with proper expressions of prayer (5.13ff.).

THE FLOW OF JAMES FROM 1.1–2.13

Author: (lit.) "Jacob." He is writing to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, the new "children of Israel."

1.2-18 - Faith must be tested and perfected. Once we go through this, we will receive the crown of life; i.e., participate in the resurrection of the just.

1.19-2.13 - Some may be wanting to bring about the destruction of Jerusalem with violence. Jesus has told them differently. They are to obey his word and do deeds of mercy; e.g., visiting the orphans and widow in their affliction.

2.1ff. - they are not to show partiality to the rich. When they do so they stand against Christ because they stand with those who oppose him.

2.12-13 are a summary and what will be further unfolded. In the end we will be judged by Christ and his Law. Those who don't show mercy will receive none, but mercy will triumph over judgment. This is what Jesus says in Matt 5.7: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."

The type of faith that will be able to stand in the judgment before Christ is the type of faith that perseveres in obedience to God's word, now revealed in Christ. That word emphasizes the demonstration of mercy and love to others, not violence and compromise.

1. A WORKLESS FAITH CANNOT SAVE (14-17)

James' emphasis is on "say." This person claims to hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 2.1).

If he *says* he has faith but does not have works, can *that faith* save him?

(1) James is contrasting genuine, saving–justifying–faith with false faith. This is indicated in his specifically pointing to "that faith;" i.e., the faith that is devoid of works. (2) James is speaking about salvation, not vindication/justification before men. His concern is whether or not the faith one claims is the proper *kind* of faith. James is dealing, then, with the *nature* of saving faith. He is *not* asking whether or not we merit our justification/salvation. (3) Works here are not exactly equal to Paul's use of works of the Law. James is speaking of works of love that exhibit genuine faith. When Paul dealt with works of the Law, he was dealing with more of the Jew-Gentile distinction. (cp. Gal 5.6)

The question: “If the faith you say you have does not cause you to conform yourself to Christ’s word/law, can you really trust that faith to save you?” The understood answer is “No.”

A test of faith: “brother or sister” has physical needs. This is a member of the Christian family.

He asks, If you see them in genuine need and you simply *say* to them ‘Be warmed and filled, notwithstanding you do not give them those things which are needful for the body, what does it profit?’ Can you really say that you are loyal or have faith in the King whose law is summed up in loving your brother? (cp. 1Jn 3.17)

It is of no benefit to have words without deeds. In this same way, a faith that does not have deeds is of no benefit. James says it is dead and, therefore, cannot save (i.e., just like words without deeds does not help the people in need). “Faith” all by itself–i.e., faith that is merely spoken–is dead.

2. FAITH IS SHOWN IN WORKS (18)

Clear point: You cannot separate faith and works. A faith that cannot be seen is no good. It is, indeed, non-existent.

We tend to want to make fine distinctions between the two; i.e., faith and works. This is precisely the opposite of what James is arguing here. We should be careful *not* to divide them.

True faith always bears certain types of fruit. Faith is demonstrated in works.

3. PROPER CONFESSION OF FAITH CANNOT SAVE (19-20)

Reflect the heart of and highest confession of the ancient church, the *Shema*, found in Deut 6.4: “Hear, O Israel, YHWH our God, YHWH is one!”

You believe “God is one. You do well.” This is sound. It is orthodox. It is correct down to the jot and tittle.

“The demons *believe* and shudder.” The demons can confess faith like this. If all that you have is a spoken confession, that is nothing more than demonic faith.

4. FAITH IS PERFECTED IN WORKS (21-25)

“Was not Abraham our father *justified by works* when he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?” It has been popular to say that this justification of which James speaks is a demonstration of his justification before men. That simply does not work.

The result of this justification is that Abraham is a “friend of God.” Justification is essential in having this covenant status before God.

James’ concern: the *nature* of the faith that *saves*. This is his initial question in 2.14: “Can that faith–i.e., the faith that has no works–save him?” This justification is another way of describing that “saving” about which he spoke in 2.14. When James says that Abraham was justified by works, this is in contrast to a workless faith. He is not assuming that it is by works alone but by a faith that works through love (as Paul would say).

Offering of Isaac. This was a test. Abraham responded in faith. Cf. Heb 11.17-19. Abraham endured the test.

Faith is “made perfect” through works. Faith matures and comes to its intended goal. Cp. Adam, 1Pt 1.6-7; Rom 5.1-5. Saving faith is a persevering faith. A persevering faith is one that does not turn away from God in trials but becomes stronger through trials.

2.23 - Gen 15.6 was “fulfilled.” When Abraham believed God, God accounted it to him as righteousness. That is, he justified him right then. But the faith that justified then was filled out, matured, over time and through trials.

It is not by a faith that is “alone” that a man can be saved. That kind of faith cannot save. Cf. Mt 25; 18

5. LIFELESS FAITH CANNOT SAVE (26)

(1) The only saving faith is a persevering faith.

(2) Good confessions are not proof of saving faith.

