

aired on KALS November 2, 2004

James 2:14-26

14. "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

15. If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

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?

17. Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

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.'

19. You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

20. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

22. You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

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.

24. You see that a man is justified by works and not by

faith alone.

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?

26. For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

It is abundantly clear in this text of New Testament Scripture that faith alone can not save you, or anyone else for that matter. This is the reason many religious giants of the past, most notably Martin Luther, have shunned this passage of Scripture. Luther even told his followers to avoid reading the book of James, calling it “the epistle of straw.” Many faith-only preachers today avoid this scripture text like the plague, because it contradicts their teaching on salvation.

Now the main reason men have rejected this section of James, is that it seems to contradict Paul’s writings on “works”. In order to properly understand, and thus reconcile, how Paul and James each use the same term “works” in the context of their writings. In both cases, the word translated “works” means “something a person does, an action taken.”

But in context, Paul consistently refers to the works of the Old Testament Law of Moses. This was Paul’s reference for works. For example Paul states in Romans 3:20, “Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in God’s sight.”

In contrast, James uses the term “works” in reference

to obeying the New Testament covenant of Christ. In his first example of works James writes, “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead.” verses 15-17. Here James draws from Christ’s great commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

In James’ second example of works that are a part of faith, he uses Abraham. Quote: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see faith was working with his works, and as a result of works, faith was perfected; and the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘AND ABRAHEM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS!’” James 2:21-23.

We must also note here that Luther’s perspective on “works” centered on obedience to the Roman Catholic Church. Such decrees as priests being forbidden to marry and the sale of indulgences made by the church of his world, were certainly man-made and not associated with Biblical faith.

Our James passage ends with verse 24: “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.”

More on this passage next time. . . .