



# James

## Faith Without Works Is Dead

*An Urgent Call to Practical Christianity*

### Lesson #4

#### ***Preparation for Study:***

Before you begin our lesson, please pause for a moment to, search your soul, and acknowledge any known sins to God the Father. (1 John 1:9). This will restore you to fellowship with Him and allow you to comprehend and appreciate the truth of the lesson on a spiritual level.

However, if you come to this study and have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ, the solution is to trust in Christ.

*“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ [the Savior] is born of God”* (1 John 5:1)

It's faith alone in Christ alone!

(For more detail on salvation and confession of sin please see lesson #1)

#### ***James and Paul in Perfect Harmony (continued)***

James and Paul each emphasize rewards.

The apostle Paul maintained that a believer who failed to execute God's plan would lose every reward, *“but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire”* (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). James, on the other hand, uses Abraham and Rahab to illustrate that one is justified by faith (confidence) alone for his eternal salvation and by application for his reward.

Believers are justified for rewards based on works—the maximum execution of God's plan for the individual's life (James 2:21-26). Beloved, the comparisons are endless.

Another issue we need to address before we launch into James is the idea that one who is saved *must* produce good works. Keep in mind that Scripture must harmonize with Scripture. We discover that many interpreters fall short in their effort to reconcile obscure passages such as James 2:14-26 with the rest of the Bible.

An example is Millard J. Erickson. In his work *Christian Theology* he states “works do not produce salvation. Yet the biblical witness also indicates that while it is faith that leads to justification, justification must and will invariably produce works appropriate to the nature of the new creature that has come into being.”<sup>1</sup>

This statement sounds appealing. The problem is that his commentary cannot be reconciled with the rest of Scripture. He, and others who take this position, imply that every genuine believer must produce good works. However, this clearly conflicts with other passages of Scripture, such as,

*And I, brethren [a reference to those who are united with Christ], could not speak to you as to spiritual men [those who bear fruit in Christ], but as to men of flesh [lack of spiritual production, carnal], as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly [carnal, after about 18 months since their conversion and face-to-face teaching with the great apostle, Paul. Yet there was no sign of fruit (Acts 18:11)]. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly [carnal], and are you not walking [living] like mere men [unbelievers]? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).*

Despite his rebuke, he added, “*For we [Paul and his colleagues] are God’s fellow workers; you [the carnal Corinthians] are God’s field [no matter your status quo],...you belong to Christ [no matter the state of the believer, carnal or spiritual]; and Christ belongs to God*” (1 Corinthians 3:9, 23).

This is amazing indeed!

Of course, a good student of God’s Word would never ever argue that the Corinthian believers were not genuinely saved, for Paul affirmed their salvation.

For example, the word *sanctified* in 1 Corinthians 1:2 is a perfect tense participle and also in the passive voice. The perfect tense underscores the fact that their sanctification was once and for all (cf. Hebrews 10:10). The passive voice highlights the fact that their salvation was solely God’s business from start to finish—from the onset of their confidence alone, in Christ alone to the end (1 Corinthians 1:7-9, 30). James also believed this (James 1:18).

But again, anyone who examined 1 Corinthians through the lens of so-called saving faith would wonder if they were truly saved. But they were! Their salvation was a gift (Romans 6:23), not according to their deeds (2 Timothy 1:9)! It’s grace from start to finish! It’s arrogance to think that a believer who fails in his spiritual life is not truly saved.

What about the Exodus generation? Should we doubt their salvation? Over two million of them were eternally saved on the “Passover night” prior to their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. But suffice it to say, “*they believed in the LORD [Yahweh]*” (Exodus 14:31), the same way their father Abraham “*believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness*” (Genesis 15:6).

However, from that moment on, spiritual failure marked their journey. Many times, the Lord punished them severely. For instance, on one occasion “*twenty-three thousand fell in one day*” (1 Corinthians 10:8; cf. Numbers 25:9). Because of their accumulated spiritual failures the

Israelites eventually used up their last extension of grace, and the Lord, according to His justice, had no recourse but to administer judgment: “*So the LORD’S anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the LORD was destroyed*” (Numbers 32:13).

Two questions are in order. Were they believers? What was their spiritual failure?

The Bible states they were believers: “*All ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10:3-4).

But nothing in their behavior could point anyone who observed them to the life of Christ. They had been delivered from slavery by the true God, yet they returned wholeheartedly to idolatry. Over and over they complained about God and Moses.

God called them “*an obstinate people*” (Exodus 32:9). At one point, God wanted to wipe them out completely. They were spared only because of Moses’ intercessory prayer (Exodus 32:10-14). Afterward, they continued in obstinate carnality until God destroyed that generation because of their “*unfaithfulness*” (Numbers 14:33).

Moses failed also, and his failure cost him entry into the promised land. Clearly the promised land was a reward. Loss of that reward did *not* mean loss of salvation. Remember, that same Moses was with the Lord at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:2-3).

In light of this truth, take notice: it is false to believe that those who are truly saved must produce good works. To believe this is to believe that the spiritual life is automatic, that it is a natural thing.

On the contrary, it requires self-discipline, personal responsibility and perseverance, utilizing the power of the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:13). To insist that regeneration *must* evidence itself in good works is to downplay the enormous magnitude that the sin nature exerts on us upon new birth (Galatians 5:16,17).

Please join us for our next lesson when we will look at bearing fruit. Until then may God bless you and keep you.

---

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books,1998), 972-973.

1/9/12

