

FAITH AND WORKS

FAITH AND WORKS: THE THIRD OPTION

We live in polarized times. You're a conservative Republican or a liberal Democrat. You're a compassionate artist or a rough and tough hunter. You're black or white, you're up or down, you're an Aggie or a Longhorn, and you had better choose one.

Our passage today is the most difficult passage in James, and perhaps the entire New Testament, because people choose sides. Is it faith or works that saves us?

Romans 3:28: For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

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

So which is it? Faith or works?

The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 sought to answer this very question: What does it take to be okay with God?

Fundamentalists say that Christianity is all about believing the right things.

Progressives will say that Christianity is all about doing the right things.

James 2: 14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James rejects the false dichotomy between faith and works. Instead, he suggests that our faith is proven by our works.

Simply saying you believe in God and not acting on it makes you not just a bad Christian; it makes you no better than a demon.

James 2: 18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Faith without works is not faith at all, but a simple lack of obedience to God."

James is saying that faith is about the head, the heart, and the hands

Question Set 1

FAITH AND WORKS: THE WORLD OF THE BIBLE

THE CULTURE OF THE BIBLE WAS A COLLECTIVIST CULTURE.

“Collectives are defined by the things they share with others, things such as shared blood, shared interests, shared history, shared land, and shared loyalty. They define their core identity as being part of a group, in distinction to other groups.” E. Randolph Richards and Richard James, *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes*

OUR MODERN WESTERN CULTURE IS AN INDIVIDUALIST CULTURE.

We define our identity by our individuality; what we like, what we do, what we believe, where we live, the teams we cheer for, and our hobbies.

Why does this matter? When we read the Bible, we need to understand that there are things happening between the lines that we as individualists might not immediately grasp.

Ephesians 2:8: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God.

Richards and James: “Scholars use the term patronage or patron-client relationship to talk about reciprocal relationships between uneven parties.”

Patrons have more power and resources. They bless their clients with charity in exchange for loyalty, favors, and faith.

In Ephesians 2:8, “grace” is “charis” in Greek. “Faith” is “pistis.” These are the main words used to describe a patronage relationship in Koine Greek.

What is a saving relationship with Jesus? He becomes our patron and we become His clients. That relationship means that in exchange for salvation and grace, we give our loyalty, our faith, and our works.

Question Set 2

FAITH AND WORKS: BEHAVING LIKE A BELIEVER

Salvation comes by faith in Christ alone. It is not something you can earn

Belief drives Behavior What you think should affect how you act.

In James 2, we see an example of a belief that changed every action of a person named Abraham.

James 2: 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.

Abraham had to get off his couch and start walking to see the promises of God fulfilled. Each step was a test of faith, and a proof of his belief.

What would an alien say about your life? What would he say you worship?

Belief drives behavior, and behavior reflects belief.