

Sermon or Lesson: James 2:20-24 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Faith And Deeds - Working Together

INTRO: Imagine living on a farm 100 years ago, and you have a heavy wagon of valuable hay that you need to quickly get into the barn before the rain starts. Moving this heavy wagon requires the side-by-side pulling from both of your only 2 horses. But one of your horses has been so sick that he can hardly stand. He is all skin and bones, and looks like he is going to keel over dead any second now.

How well do you think your team of horses will do when they are both hooked together to pull this heavy wagon of hay into the barn? Sorry, your valuable wagon of hay is about to become a worthless wet rotting pile because your nearly-dead horse is not working together with the other horse. Your team of horses is useless without both functioning properly.

As we study our passage in James, we are going to see that in a similar way, our faith is useless if our faith is not working together with our properly functioning good deeds.

READ: James 2:20-24

[Lesson Question: What is the nature of the literary form being used here in verse 20 and following?]

SECTION POINT: A response is being given to an anticipated line of thinking that wants more evidence.

- - The phrase "do you want evidence" (v.20) suggests a second anticipated reaction or line of thinking to the contention statement in preceding verse 17. (The first anticipated reaction is in verse 18.)
 - - The fact that this line of thinking is being raised suggests again that it too is common and perhaps natural to humanistic thinking.
 - - So, verse 20 states the anticipated line of thinking and then an answer is given in the form of an example with explanation in verses 21-24 (and another example is in verse 25).
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v.20 - READ

[Lesson Question: Why is the word "foolish" used here in verse 20 to describe a person who objects to the principle "that faith without deeds is useless"?)

SECTION POINT: It is a foolish and spiritually immature person who is not satisfied with the sufficient information that has already been supplied here in James, "wanting evidence that faith without deeds is useless".

- - The usage of the word "foolish" suggests this proposed principle has hence been clearly explained and is plainly evident and understandable, and therefore an objecting person who fails to see this is "foolish", "empty, vain, and shallow" in their faith for wanting proof. (Strong's #2756)
- - Such a request for evidence is diametrically contrary to the essence of faith, which is to take and accept what God tells us without any evidence. (see Hebrews 11:1)

Therefore, the thinking behind this common objection suggests this kind of person may have some or all of the following:

- - disbelief - does not believe much more than there is one God, and needs proof for any principles beyond that;
- - lacking genuine faith - is looking for a shortcut; trying to fulfill only the bare minimum;
- - foolish - is short-sighted and has a narrow view of God and the future;
- - rebellious - is resistant to obeying and pleasing God;
- - uncommitted - is not ready to be convinced, converted, and committed;
- - self-centered - is not willing and is even openly resistant to being others-centered;
- - laziness - does not want to exert the effort of good deeds;
- - selfish or greedy - does not want to invest any of his/her own time or resources into the well-being of others;
- - deluded - is incorrectly convinced that he/she possesses God-approved faith, when in actuality his/her faith is "useless" - Strong's #3498 "inoperative, dead"; "worthless, inactive, ineffective" (AMP).

v.21 - READ

[Lesson Question: Was Abraham made righteous or justified before God by what he did?]

SECTION POINT: Abraham **showed himself** to be justified before God by his righteous actions that proceeded forth from his faith in God.

"considered righteous" = #1344 "to render" in the sense of "presenting" or "showing as being just or innocent" (from Strong's and AHD - 'render')

IMPORTANT NOTE: According to Greek expert Zodhiates, "Because of the --ōō ending on the verb, the Greek verb dikaiōō (pronounced dik-ah-yo'-o) #1344 means to bring out the fact that a person is righteous and does not usually mean the way in which the justification takes place" (p.462).

- - From this close examination of this original Greek word used in verse 21, an accurate interpretation would be "Abraham was **shown** to be justified by his works" (AMP), while making the distinction that he was **not made** justified by his works. This interpretation is clearly and solidly supported by Romans 4:1-5, which further adds that God made Abraham justified solely because of his faith, that "was credited to him as righteousness". And Abraham was not justified by works, otherwise he would have "something to boast about". (Romans 4:2)
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v.22 - READ

[Lesson Question: In the example of Abraham, what was the interplay between his faith and his actions?]

SECTION POINT: Abraham's faith and his actions were interconnected-ly working together.

- - Abraham obeyed God with his deeds according to his faith; (implied in v.22)
 - - Abraham's "faith and his actions were working together", implying they fit together well, functioning as a unified whole, and perhaps they can be thought of as being co-dependent on each other;
 - - Abraham's actions were a necessary component to bring completion to his faith.
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vv.23-24 - READ

[Lesson Question: In the example of Abraham, what was the interplay between God and Abraham in regard to Abraham's faith and actions?]

SECTION POINT: Through his faith, that was working interconnect-ly with his actions, Abraham successfully met God's requirements to be fully accepted and justified by God.

- - "Abraham believed God" (v.23); Abraham acted upon what he believed (v.21); God responded to the faith of Abraham by crediting his faith to him as righteousness (v.23). (cf. Hebrews 11:17-19)
- - God further responded by calling Abraham His "friend" (v.23), meaning being "dear; actively fond" (Strong's #5384); this implies being fully accepted, fully justified, embraced, and brought in close.
- - The conclusion (v.24) then is a person is shown to be justified by his faith that produces good deeds and not "merely" (Strong's #3440) by his "faith, which is useless without deeds" (v.20).

NOTE: The same Greek verb dikaiōō #1344 is used in both verse 21 for "considered righteous" (NIV) and in verse 24 for "justified" (NIV); and again here in verse 24 it carries a demonstrative sense rather than a declarative or judicial sense.

BIG IDEA: Like Abraham, your faith and your deeds need to be working together, which makes your faith alive and complete.

APPLICATIONS:

Abraham "believed God" (v.23), and subsequently he actively took a step of faith when he "offered his son Isaac on the altar" (v.21), willing to sacrifice his most cherished possession in faith and obedience to God.

-- Have you been believing God to the extent that you have been actively taking steps of faith and obedience? Have you been willing to make sacrifices? Has your faith been working together with your actions, which brings completion to your faith?

-- Have you been consistent and successful in making your faith alive and active? God says it is foolish to want evidence that your faith needs to be working together with good deeds. If you want God to bless you in a similar way that He did to Abraham, then the wise response for you is to immediately start putting your faith into action. Make that choice and start implementing it right now.

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