

# What About James?

Does James 2:14 teach that, unless good works can be seen in the life of a professed believer, the person is not actually saved into eternal life? At first glance this may seem to be the correct interpretation, but upon closer examination, we find that James is writing of something else entirely. The harmful effects of misunderstanding this passage have robbed many people of security and the joy of their salvation. It also leads many away from the foundation of grace and into a shaky foundation of human performance. Such error casts a shadow over the sufficiency of Christ's cross work.

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?” - James 2:14

Obviously, the answer to the precise question asked by James is, “no, faith cannot save him.” We will see what this one's faith cannot save him from in the context of James 1 and 2.

## First Things First

The text of James chapter 1 and 2 is not a gospel tract. It is a blistering rebuke of saved people who are not doing well. They have already been saved by faith in the finished work of Christ. These are called “brethren” in James 1:2 and are said to have “faith” in 1:3. The problem is that these brethren who have faith are not “doers of the word” (1:22). These believers are treating poor people (even believers) unfairly (2:4). James writes to them that their works by faith could benefit others, but their faith alone (without works) has no benefit to the needy. Their faith alone has no profit to the needy - it is dead to them.

## “Can Faith Save Him?”

If this question is taken to mean, “what will save sinners from spiritual death to eternal life?” then the answer is, “faith.” This is perfectly explained in the words of scripture:

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” - Romans 4:5

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law...” - Galatians 2:16

## Saving the Saved

Save” means to deliver. Many times in scripture, the word “save” does not refer to eternal salvation, but some other form of deliverance. Salvation often is needed from a temporal situation such as sickness, physical death, or an undesirable circumstance (Genesis 45:7, Luke 23:39, Philippians 1:19, James 1:21). Since these to whom James writes already have received eternal salvation, through their faith, they need to be saved from something else. What?

## Context, Context, Context

Understanding comes when we stick to the context of scripture, rather than reading ideas into a text that we have not studied properly. Remember the problem stated in James 1:22 - 2:12? These believers are not producing good works that will benefit others. The consequence of this failure is stated in the next verse, 2:13.

“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy...”

The saving that these believers need is to be delivered from being judged. A believer may indeed come under God's present discipline as a child and may suffer the loss of future reward. If the saving of which James writes

were a saving from sin into eternal life then the answer to “Can faith save him?” would be, “yes, of course”. Faith is the only thing that could save a sinner from Hell. This is not the saving that James has in mind, since these are already eternally saved. James asks if faith will save these lazy Believers from an unfavorable judgment [2:12, 13]. The answer is no! Their faith will not spare them from the loss of rewards that will affect believers who were not doers of the word.

“So speak ye and so do as those who will be judged according to the perfect law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that has showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” - 2:12, 13

### **The Point of James 2 is Judgment of Believers!**

James reminds these believers of the fact that they will be judged according to their speech and deeds - obviously referring to the Judgment Seat of Christ. This future judgment will be Christ’s review of believers’ works. The result of this review will be that rewards are given, or not given. (The Judgment Seat of Christ is further explained in I Corinthians 3:10-15 and II Corinthians 5:10, 11). Clearly then, it is an unfavorable judgment that these eternally saved believers need saving from. In contrast to these believers, there will be those at the Judgment seat of Christ who did abide in the Word, and were doers of the work. These obedient ones will be rewarded, or “blessed in their deeds” (1:25).

### **Have Mercy!**

The need for these believers is to produce works that will benefit others around them. If they show mercy through their works, they will face a favorable review at the judgment of believers’ works. If they fail to produce these needed works, they will face an unfavorable review. Their faith, though it has saved them from their sin to eternal life, will not save them from this unfavorable judgment.

### **Faith Alone Saves to Eternal life, Good Work Rewards the Saved**

Faith alone saves to eternal life. Works produced by those who have faith will lead to a favorable outcome of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God will not allow works, in any degree, before or after faith, to enter into eternal salvation. Nor will God allow faith to produce a favorable reward for a believer who has no work.

Is it possible that a person could have faith and be saved, yet not be doing works afterwards? Of course. This is why James wrote the letter. This would be possible (Romans 4:5, I Corinthians 3:15), but certainly not desirable.

### **What Should We Do?**

Do we backload works into the Gospel by telling people that they have to work after believing in order to go to heaven? That would be a false gospel, wouldn’t it? We simply, properly teach them the Word. We teach them to be saved by grace, through faith. Then we teach them who they are, what they have, and how to walk in Christ.

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### **In Conclusion**

Let it be known that all Believers in Christ have a responsibility to do good works and obey. Every Believer has the spiritual equipment to do works and obey. All Believers are under scriptural commands to work and obey. But before any work is done, a Believer is saved by faith in Christ. Justification is given “...freely, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” -Romans 3:24.

A Believer may have no work. Shame on him. He will be saved but not rewarded.