

Good Faith & Good Works

Thomas Robinson, *Faith & Works 1*, August 11, 2019

James 2:1-9; 14-26 Translation TR

Faith in Jesus Excludes Treating People by Distinctions of Status

¹ My brothers and sisters, when you value the **masks of status** in people, do you really **hold the faith** of our **Lord Jesus, Anointed King** of true **glory**?

² For if a **man** comes into your gathering, wearing **gold rings** on his fingers and **brilliant clothes**, and if an **impoverished person** with **dirty clothes** also comes in, ³ and if you pay special attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, if you please," but to the poor person you say, "You stand," or, "Sit there by my footstool," ⁴ haven't you enforced **class distinctions** among yourselves, and you've become **judges** with **evil ways of reasoning**?

⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Didn't **God choose** those that **the world** marks by **poverty** to find genuine **wealth in faith** and to be **heirs** of the very **kingdom** that **God promised** to those who **love him**? ⁶ But you've **deprived** the **impoverished person** of their **honor**.

Isn't it the **rich** that use their power to **oppress you**? Aren't they the very ones who drag you into courts? ⁷ Don't they themselves **blaspheme** the beautiful **name** that was invoked over you?

⁸ If you're indeed fulfilling **our king's law** according to the scripture, "**You shall love your neighbor as yourself**" [Lev 19:18, Mk 12:31], you're doing well! ⁹ But if you're valuing people's **masks of status**, you're **working sin** since you're convicted by the law as transgressors. ...

For Everyone, Faith Expresses Its Living Reality Through Works.

¹⁴ What's the benefit, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to **have a faith** but doesn't have works? Such **faith** isn't able to deliver them is it? ¹⁵ If a **brother or a sister is without clothing** and they're going **without daily food**, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "**Go in peace; stay warm and eat your fill**," but **you don't give them what their body needs**, what's the benefit?

¹⁷ Just so, that **faith**, if it has **no works**, is by itself **dead**. ¹⁸ Rather, one will say, "You for your part **have a faith** and I for my part **have works**. Show me that **faith** of yours apart from the **works**, and I indeed from my **works** will show you my **faith**."

¹⁹ You have **faith** that "**there is one God**" [Deut 6:4; Mk 12:29]; you're doing well. The demons also have that faith, and they shudder! ²⁰ But do you, a person who hasn't thought this through, really want to learn that this **faith** apart from its **works** is **without effect**?

²¹ **Abraham, our father** – wasn't he counted **righteous** from **works** when he offered his son **Isaac** on the altar [Gen 22:9-18]? ²² You're observing that his **faith** was **working together** with his **works**, and **from those works the faith was brought to completion**. ²³ Also the **scripture** was **fulfilled** that says, "**Abraham had faith in God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness**" [Gen 15:6], and he was called God's "**friend**" [Exod 33:11; Isaiah 41:8].

²⁴ What you're seeing is that **any human** is counted **righteous** from **works** and not from a **faith alone**. ²⁵ But in just the same way, wasn't **Rahab the harlot** also counted **righteous** from **works** when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road [Jos 2:1-16]? ²⁶ For just as the **body** without animating **spirit** is **dead**, so also the **faith** that has no **works** is **dead**.

James 1:9-10

⁹ Let the brother or sister of low status celebrate their new high position, ¹⁰ and let the rich celebrate their humbling, because like a flower in the grass, each will pass away.

Galatians 3:1-2; 5-8 Faith rather than Works of Law

¹ ...Who's bewitched you? It was before your eyes, that Jesus Anointed King was portrayed crucified. ² Tell me just one thing: Was it from works of law you received the Spirit or from hearing leading to faith? ...

⁵ Then the one who gives you the Spirit and works his powers among you – is that from works of law, or from hearing leading to faith? ⁶ Just so, Abraham "had faith in God, and it was reckoned to him as

righteousness" [Gen 15:6]. ⁷ You understand then that it is those defined from faith who are children of

Abraham. ⁸ But since Scripture foresaw that from faith God counts the nations (Gentiles) righteous, it told this good news to Abraham in advance, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" [Gen 22:18].

Galatians 5:5-6 Not Works of Law but Faith Working through Love

For by Spirit from faith, we're waiting eagerly for a hope based on God's righteousness. For in Anointed King Jesus neither circumcision has any power nor uncircumcision, but rather faith that's working through love.

Mark 12:29-31 Jesus teaches the Great Commandments

²⁹ Jesus said, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one'; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength' [Dt 6:4-5]. ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' [Lev 19:18] There is no other commandment greater than these."

Faith and Works – Battle or No Battle

In the Reformation, leaders like Martin Luther and John Calvin saw how the Medieval church often used pious, sacramental works to control people and missed the entire message of justification by faith & God's grace. They insisted on Faith alone as the basis of salvation. Faith & Works (good deeds) stood in opposition, based on Paul. James was "straw" (Luther).

Different meanings for "Works." (1) Works of law as group boundaries for a pure community (circumcision, food laws). (2) Works as actions of generosity, service, & reconciliation embodying God's self-giving love. Paul reflects on both as he builds communities of both Jews and non-Jews. "Works of law" – protective, defining markers for Jewish communities. But they excluded non-Jews. Debates about circumcision were about including all nations. Paul always insists on (2): Life transformed by Christ's love, actively serving others.

Faith Works to Define Life, Shape Life, Give Life

James says nothing about (1) but reflects only on (2) as the "royal law" of King Jesus who taught the Great Commands: Loving the One God and Loving your neighbor as yourself.

2:1-9 – Loving neighbor excludes the entire class/wealth hierarchy so deeply embedded in society's "masks of status." Create a community that exalts the impoverished and humbles the rich/powerful. The values of the world always push in. Wealth/power continually empowers abuse. Holding the Faith of Jesus means acting with love so both poor & rich live new life.

2:14-26 – Belief in one God means all are brothers & sisters. More than welcoming the poor, it means sharing needs for life (Mt 25:34-36). Otherwise the faith hasn't delivered real life. But more: We link Faith with Abraham: tested with Isaac, counted righteous, God's friend. But that power is just as real in a Gentile pagan prostitute named Rahab. Both society hierarchies and religious hierarchy are overthrown by Faith working through Love. Action that embodies God's Love is the vital Spirit that gives life to the great body of Faith.

Practice Working Faith: Worship, Pray, Study: Go deep! Community of Hope; Teach children; Mentor youth; THEA; Giver of Dreams; Divorce Care; Ministry of Love; Camp Shiloh; Faith, Race & Justice; Diverse Community; Political involvement. Be a family for each other.