

# Studies in James

James 2:14-26 & James 3:1-12

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### The Message

#### James 2: 14 - 26

One of the topics that has caused much confusion in certain Christian circles is the topic of works and deeds, and how they relate to faith. James 2:18 warns us of the false claim that there can exist 'faith' Christians and 'deeds' Christians, i.e., that faith and deeds can exist independently of each other. We also need to be aware of how this relates to justification and salvation.

Paul tells us that it is grace through faith and not by works that we are saved (Ephesians 2: 8-10). This is the key to our understanding because it is through grace and faith that we are justified (Romans 3: 21 - 31, Romans 5: 1 - 2). There is nothing that we can do in ourselves that will save us since, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*".

This means that like the rich young ruler, it is not enough to live the letter of the law and do all the 'right things' (Mark 10: 17 - 23, Luke 18: 18 - 30). Even the devil believes in God. This challenges us by forcing us to realise that faith is more than intellectual acceptance of certain truths without trust in Christ as Saviour.

So, if works and deeds is not enough, what is James telling us? We need to ask ourselves what is the evidence of true faith? (2 Corinthians 6: 3 - 13, Galatians 5: 16 - 26, Ephesians 4: 2 - 6, Ephesians 5: 8 - 11, Colossians 3: 12 - 17). Do you see these qualities - the Fruit of the Spirit - in today's Church? Where the Fruit of the Spirit are present, it enhances the life of the Church and its members. No room remains for the 'works of the flesh'.

James is telling us that if we have faith then the natural outworking of that faith should be deeds that are in keeping with the Fruit of the Spirit. Righteous action is evidence of a genuine faith - not that the righteous action saves in itself. It is impossible to have true faith without that faith being evidenced by deeds. Faith that stops at words is not faith at all.

#### James 3: 1 - 12

Scripture tells us much about why we should 'tame the tongue'. We know that "*A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instructions*" (Proverbs 16: 23). Jesus tells us more about this in Matthew 15: 7 - 20. Striving to be faultless in what we say is so important; James tells us that "*If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check*" (James 3: 2). The implication here is that since the tongue is so difficult to control, anyone who controls it perfectly gains control of himself in all other areas of life as well.

As a result of the significance James tells us that "*Not many of you should presume to be teachers...*" (James 3: 1). Teaching is something that should only be entered into through much prayer, remembering that it is better to say nothing if God has given you nothing to say. We only need to be aware of what is happening in today's Church to see what happens when people give teaching that is not of the Lord. But the responsibility is twofold since it also rests with the hearers, who must weigh up and "*Test everything*" (1 Thessalonians 5: 19-22). Clearly there are teachers who have brought teaching not of God, and congregations who have not tested it!

James goes on to tell us how easily the tongue can lead us into difficulties, citing allegories of a bit in a horse or a rudder on a large ship (James 3: 3-6). As Christians, we should be bridled or controlled by the Spirit (Romans 8:6). We must also remember that a bridle does not hurt the horse.

## Questions

1. What reasons can you think of why we are not saved by works?
2. Listed below are some of the Fruit of the Spirit. From the references mentioned earlier within the study, write down any additional ones that are not mentioned.
3. Meditate in your next quiet time and ask God that He might produce more of the Fruit of the Spirit in your life.

## The Fruit of the Spirit

- Love** (Agapē) Interesting to note that love is usually found at the head of the list. Love characterizes God, and when performed by men and women love fulfills the Law (Romans 13: 10). It is a self-giving action for the benefit of others, fully illustrated by Christ's self-giving on the cross (Galatians 2: 20, Ephesians 5: 25).
- Joy** (Chara) Even in trials, believers may retain the joy of the Lord, which prevents them from giving way to total despair (Romans 14: 17).
- Peace** (Eirēnē) Genuine Christian existence demonstrates the peace of God because believers have peace with God (Romans 5: 1). Peace is not a precondition of justification; more rather justification is the precondition and root from which such a quality will grow.
- Patience** (Makrothymia) Patience is a positive value embracing steadfastness and staying power. Patience, or forbearance, is a quality of God (Psalm 103: 8), and it is to be reproduced in God's people (1 Corinthians 13: 4, Ephesians 4: 2, Colossians 1: 11, Colossians 3: 12).
- Kindness** (Chrēstotēs) The Holy Spirit produces in believers the attitude of kindness - putting love into action. Kindness is a quality of God's gracious attitude and actions towards sinners (Romans 2: 4, Ephesians 2: 7, Titus 3: 4). Christians have no better way to continue in God's kindness than by showing others the kindness of God (Ephesians 4: 32).
- Goodness** (Agathōsynē) The idea of moral excellence, related to holiness. Also the 'Fruit of Light' (Ephesians 5: 9).
- Faithfulness** (Pistis) Since God is faithful (Romans 3: 3), His people are also to be faithful. The word points to the idea of reliability or trustworthiness.
- Gentleness** (Praütēs) This quality denotes strength and meekness, denoting strength under control. This meekness, the meekness of Christ, has its basis in love, not weakness (2 Corinthians 10: 1, 1 Corinthians 4: 21). Completely different to the diluted understanding of the word that we have in the English language. It is as a result of 'Praütēs' that we can correct others and speak the truth in love.
- Self-Control** (Enkráteia) This ends the list and provides a sense of structured unity; perfection and completeness. The word is derived from the root 'krat-' denoting power or lordship. Self-control is total submission to God.