

## ‘Faith and Works’

A subscriber says: “Please harmonize James 2:24, 25 with verses 22 and 23 and verses 17 and 18 of the same chapter.” This is easily done, or, rather, there is no necessity for doing it, as they are already in harmony. The statement in each is practically the same. Beginning with verse 15 we read: “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.”

Verses 15 and 16 forcibly illustrate the truth that words, without corresponding deeds, amount to nothing. Professions of sympathy for the distressed are worthless, unless some practical sympathy is shown. A man may, for a short time, get the reputation of being charitable, simply because of his fervent professions of sympathy for the poor; but if he is never known to render them any assistance, people soon come to regard his professions of sympathy as false, and become disgusted with them. Just so it is with faith, says the apostle. A man may profess faith in Christ, but if no works are manifest, there is no faith there.

In the eighteenth verse he supposes a case. The man who has works may say to one who professes faith without works: Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works. But, according to verse 17, a man cannot exhibit faith without works; if he has no works, it is an evidence that he has no faith. But the fact that a man has good works is of itself evidence that he has faith, for good works are the invariable result of living faith.

This is shown by verses 21-23: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.” Some have thought that this contradicts Paul’s statement that a man is justified by faith only; but it does not. James explains how a man is justified by works, by the case of Abraham. His faith was manifest by works, and by works was made perfect. That is, his works showed that he had perfect faith. By proceeding to offer Isaac upon the altar, he showed his faith in the power of God to raise him from the dead, and thus to fulfill the promise, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” See Heb. 11:17-19. James himself says by the offering of Isaac the scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness,” thus showing that he was justified by faith and not by works; and so when he says that Abraham was justified by works, it is in a secondary sense, since it was the works alone which showed that he had saving faith.

It was the same with Rahab. James says, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out

another way.” James 2:25. Paul says, “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.” Heb. 11:31. Now both are strictly correct. Rahab was justified by faith; but she would not have been justified by faith if her faith had been merely a simple assent to the fact that God was leading the Israelites. Such a belief as that would not have been real faith. But she had so strong a faith in what she had heard about God’s leading the Israelites into the land of Canaan, that she did the works required of her, and so in a secondary sense she was justified by works, since it was her works that testifies to the reality of her faith.

These scriptures show how inseparable are faith and works. So closely united are they that the possession of one presupposes the possession of the other. Yet it must not be forgotten that faith is first. There can be no works where there is no faith. We read: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,” and, “the just shall live by faith.” This is literally true. It is also true, as Paul says, that “if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Rom. 10:9. Also when the jailer asked, “What shall I do to be saved?” Paul answered him truly, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Acts 16:31. This may be said to comprise all that is necessary for salvation, because works are included in faith; they follow it as surely as flowers follow the showers of spring. If a man has the faith of Abraham, he will do the works of Abraham; if a man really believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he will bring forth works “meet for repentance.”

E. J. Waggoner.

The Signs of the Times 13, 24 (June 23, 1887), p. 376.