

“By Works, and Not by Faith Only”
By Trey Sullins

Would you bungee jump, get in an airplane, or get on a roller coaster if you were deathly afraid of these things? Of course, you would not! While the technology and equipment might be safe, your fear would restrict you from being able to do them. Faith kind of works the same way. We can have all the beliefs and convictions about God in perfect order, but until we actually take action upon that then our faith means nothing. There is a powerful passage in James 2 which explains exactly this. Christians must understand that a living faith requires appropriate and godly works.

What is it that makes faith profitable? The Bible answers this question plainly. “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?... Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14, 17). The word “profitable” means that someone good comes to the one who has faith. James is explaining to the Christian that the only way in which faith brings good results is when works are accompanying it. James further explains this with the illustration about someone who is in need of food and clothing in verse 15. If someone like this came up to you and you told them “I hope you get what you need, goodbye.” Would this destitute person’s belly be filled? No. Nothing would have changed at all! Therefore, when you say you believe in God, but do nothing has anything changed?

The Bible shows examples of the profitability of a living faith. In Matthew 8:5-13 there is a centurion man who pleads with Jesus to heal his paralyzed son. The centurion says that he knows all Jesus has to do is speak the word and his son would be healed. Jesus then heals the man’s son and says, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (Matthew 8:10). Notice the many signs of the centurion’s working faith. First, he goes to Jesus (Matthew 8:5). Second, he asks Jesus to heal his son (Matthew 8:6). Third, he humbles himself by saying he is not worthy of Jesus to come to his house (Matthew 8:8). Fourth, he says that Jesus needs only to speak, and the son will be healed (Matthew 8:9). There is an obvious pattern with this man’s faith; it was coupled with works! Can you imagine if instead the centurion sat at home and said, “I believe in Jesus.” Would his son have been healed? Certainly not! Another powerful example is Abraham. Hebrews 11:8 says, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” The Bible reveals plainly the history of Abraham, who did everything that God commanded him to do. Once more can you imagine if after being told to God’s command Abraham said, “I believe in you God” and did nothing else. If Abraham never obeyed but only believed, then he would have never been a part of God’s plan. “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

It is also necessary to understand, justification requires a living faith. “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). So many in the religious world today have perverted the scriptures to create doctrines such as salvation by faith alone, once saved always saved, and unconditional salvation. When you look into the New Testament you find that these ideas are not found. In fact, James 2:23 explains the truthful understanding of one of the “proof texts” of people who believe doctrines like those just mentioned. James wrote, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” James 2:23 Why was his belief accounted to him for righteousness? Because verse 22 already explains, “Do you see that faith was working

together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" His faith paired with works is what made him righteous.

There truly is simplicity in Christ. When we look to understand only what God has provided and leave out what man has created, we find the truth that leads to salvation. Abraham, Sarah, Rahab, Enoch, Isaac, Jacob and so many others were justified by their faith only because they had works which were in accordance with the will of God.