

CHAPTER TEN

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORK IN JAMES 2

God's Word is very clear concerning the condition for salvation. God shows us that salvation is by faith and not by works. We have read enough Scriptures and seen enough clear reasons why our works cannot come into consideration. Because we believe in God's work through His Son, there must not be works of our own. Yet some who do not understand the words of the Bible have come to me, asking, "Is it not true that the book of James tells us clearly that a man is not justified by faith, but by works? Is it possible that James and Paul contradict each other? And is it possible that man is justified by both faith and works?" These ones think that James and Paul do not agree with each other. They think that the books of Romans, Galatians, and James also do not agree with each other. I have to use Paul's expression: "Absolutely not!" Let us come to the book of James and see what James himself had to say.

When we read the book of James, we must take care of one thing. We can only read what is said; we cannot add into it our own thoughts. What counts is what James said. What one adds on top of that does not count. Do not read your own thoughts into the book of James. You must see what James said and not what he did not say.

THE SUBJECT OF JAMES BEING MERCY— JUSTIFICATION BEING INCIDENTAL

We will read James 2:14-26. But before we read this passage, I want to first ask a question: What is the context of these verses? Paul wrote the book of Romans with a subject in mind. He also wrote Galatians with a subject in mind. Romans says that man is justified by faith; Galatians says that man is not justified by works. Romans speaks from the positive side; Galatians speaks from the negative side. Romans declares positively how man is justified; Galatians argues negatively how to be justified and how not to be justified. Hence, the two books, Romans and Galatians, complement each other. The subject of these books is strictly justification. They deal specifically with the problem of justification. One deals with the problem from the positive side; the other deals with it from the negative side.

Many people feel that James 2 is a difficult chapter. What is the subject of James 2? The subject of Romans is justification, and the subject of Galatians is also justification. But what is the subject of James 2? The subject of this chapter covers at least mercy and help to others. What do the verses prior to this portion say? Beginning from verse 6 James says, "But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you and is it not they who drag you to the courts? Is it not they who blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called? If indeed you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; but if you respect persons, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles in one point has become guilty of all. For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. For the judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (vv. 6-13). The subject of these verses

is the showing of mercy. James tells us not to flatter the rich, but rather to care for the lowly and show mercy on the poor. This is what verses 1 through 13 say. Moreover, verse 1 is a continuation of chapter one. The last verse of chapter one says, "This is pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (v. 27). This is James's subject. If a man says that he is a godly Christian, his godliness should be manifested in his care and giving to the orphans and widows. He should not invite someone wearing splendid clothing to sit in a good place and ask the orphans, the widows, and the poor to sit under his footstool. He should care for, show mercy, and give to the despised ones. James's subject is pure and undefiled religion. Pure and undefiled religion is manifested toward the poor, the lowly, and the despised.

After 2:14, he continues to talk about giving: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacks daily food, and any one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, yet you do not give them the necessities of the body, what is the profit?" (vv. 15-16). At the end of chapter one, the subject of James is given, that is, to care for the orphans and widows. At the end of the first section of chapter two, he says that we should show mercy to others, that we should give to the poor, and that we should not despise the poor. In the second section of chapter two, James tells us what one should do when he sees a brother or a sister without clothing and lacking daily food. All these words have to do with giving to others, showing mercy on others, not despising the poor, and helping others. Verses 14 to 26 only speak of justification in passing. Because mercy, giving, and caring for orphans and widows is the subject, justification is mentioned only in passing as a means to arrive at the goal of developing his subject. Hence, we see that James is not teaching the matter of justification in his book.

The subject of our meetings during these past two weeks has been the salvation of God. But suppose that during this period I stand up on the Lord's Day morning and give a message, not on salvation, but on overcoming, or on the kingdom, or on how to reign with the Lord Jesus in the millennium. That would be the subject of my message. While I speak, I may mention eight or nine sentences about salvation in passing. If you wish to understand the doctrine of salvation, would you not consider the other messages I gave during the rest of the two weeks? Would you ignore all that was spoken in two weeks and just take the eight or nine sentences that you hear in that one message? Romans and Galatians are specifically on justification, whereas James only mentions a few words about justification. His subject is not justification, nor is his purpose to teach justification. His purpose is to exhort others to give; the matter of justification is only mentioned in passing. A person cannot overturn Romans and Galatians with James's few words on justification. Is James then in conflict with Romans and Galatians? In a while you will see that it is not. But from the start, I want you to accurately grasp the subject of James. He was not talking about justification. He was talking about mercy, about care, and about what one should do for the orphans and widows.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS BEING OF NO PROFIT

Verse 14 says, "What is the profit, my brothers, if anyone says he has faith, but does not have works?" Notice that James does not say that this man has faith in God. Do not add into this verse what James does not say. James does not say whether this man is a believer or not. He only says that this man says that he has faith. Regardless of whether he has works or not, this man himself should not say that he has faith. If you actually have faith before God, there is no need to talk

about it. Paul says that he who believes is justified. He never says that he who says that he has faith is justified. Certainly one is not justified just by saying so. I do not know what the man mentioned here is like. I do not know if he has faith or not. James does not say that he actually has faith. What we do see, however, is a boastful man. He may or may not have something within him. But whether or not he has something, he likes to make a show before others. He likes to print faith on his name card and show others that he has faith. Hence, James says, "My brothers, if anyone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" If you saw a man who is not concerned about his behavior at all, who is free to do anything, but says that he believes in Jesus, you would say the same thing as James does. You also would ask what profit it is if anyone says he has faith but does not have works. Perhaps he was fighting or arguing with someone outside a minute ago, and now he says that he has faith. If such a one had not said anything about having faith, James would not have said anything to him. The reason James says anything at all is that some do not have the works but still brag. Have you ever met such people? Such ones like to boast. They like to be exalted and glorified. Not only did James have to subdue this kind of person; we also have to subdue this kind of person.

Hence, James is not talking about having faith or not having faith. Nor is he talking about works for those who have faith. James is specifically talking about works for those who say that they have faith. He is not dealing with the works of Christians, but with the works of those who say that they are Christians. He is dealing with the works of nominal church members and nominal Christians who say that they have faith. James 2 says "if anyone." It does not say "if any Christian."

Verse 14 goes on to say, "Can that faith save him?" What is "that faith"? If faith cannot save him, then what can? James refers to "that faith," not simply "faith." If faith cannot save us, we do not need to preach anymore. But James refers to "that faith," that is, the faith that some have on their lips. Do not change around what James is saying. He is not talking about faith saving this man. He is talking about that kind of faith saving him, that is, the kind of faith that one has on his lips only. I do not know if you have ever met such people. I have met such people. They say that they are Christians, that they believe in this and that, and that their faith is this and that. Can this faith save them?

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS BEING DEAD

In verses 15-16 James gives an illustration. "If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacks daily food, and any one of you says to them..." This is the man who says that he has faith. He tells the brothers and sisters in lack, "Go in peace! May the Lord bless you. May you be clothed warmly and fed bountifully." If you asked such a one why he tells others to go in peace and why he wishes others to be warm and fed, he would tell you that it is because he has faith. He would say that he believes that these ones will be clothed warmly and fed bountifully when they go home. He would say that he believes they can go home in peace. James is talking about the kind of faith that believes in empty stomachs being automatically filled and in naked bodies being automatically clothed.

"Yet you do not give them the necessities of the body, what is the profit?" The purpose of James' illustration is not to expound on justification. Rather, it is to exhort the brothers and sisters to take practical measures. Our love to the brothers and sisters should not be in word only, but in

conduct as well. If you see someone lacking clothing and food, you should give him clothing and food. You have to take care of him. This is why James says this. James is against anyone's saying, "Go in peace, for I have believed for you already." James is saying that now is not the time for you to believe; now is the time for you to open up your wallet. For you now, faith is not the issue; the issue is the letting go of your money. If you hold on tenaciously to your wallet and tell others to go in peace, saying that you have faith, what good does this kind of faith do? If you encounter a poor brother or sister and would not give all that you have to help him and care for him, but would only say that you believe for him and that he can go in peace—if that is the kind of faith you exercised when you believed in the Lord Jesus, would such a faith save you? If that is the kind of faith you exercise toward the brothers and sisters and if that is the same kind of faith you have toward your justification, then I question if that kind of faith will justify you. James indicates that if that is the kind of faith you have toward the brothers and sisters, then perhaps that is the kind of faith you have toward the Lord Jesus, too. If the faith that you have toward the brothers and sisters is the same as the faith that you have toward salvation and justification, I question whether that faith can save you. If there is no basis to your believing in warm clothing and bountiful feeding, then there is no basis to your faith in salvation and justification. But if you see a brother in poverty and give him money, clothing, or food, and then believe, then there is basis for your faith.

When God saw you naked, hungry, and poor, did He say, "Be warm and filled. May you never go to hell. May you go to heaven"? If God's faith were like yours, no one would be saved on earth. But what did God do? When God saw us poor, hungry, naked, and dead in sin, He came to accomplish the work of redemption so that we could be saved. Thank the Lord. First, He set forth His work before us; then we received it. Is your faith toward the brothers and sisters a vain faith? If God were vain toward you, everything would be vanity indeed. And if you are vain toward God, your faith is also empty indeed. We know that we are justified and saved and that we have eternal life. Why is this? It is because God is not sitting in the clouds saying, "May everyone in the whole world be saved, and may everyone not go to the lake of fire." Rather, God came down personally from heaven to accomplish His righteousness and to deal with sin on the cross. Because God has done a concrete work, we can have faith today. That is why our faith is trustworthy.

Verse 17 says, "So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself." James does not say that a man is not saved by believing. He does not mean that a man is not justified or does not have eternal life by believing. He means that when you hear such words from this kind of person, you know that his faith is dead. If you were to ask Paul to come here today and comment on this, even he would say that this kind of faith is dead. If one only says that he has faith, but has no outward expression of it, that faith must be dead. For no matter how great one's faith is, others still need clothing and food. They cannot cover their nakedness with the light of heaven. Nor can they eat air to satisfy their hunger. Hence, a faith without works is empty and dead.

SHOWING FAITH BY WORKS

Verse 18 says, "But someone will say, You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." If a vain and boastful person

keeps on boasting, someone will eventually rise up and say, "You say that you have faith. But where is it? You should be quiet. You have faith, but I have works." Notice that this one does not say that he has works only; he does not say that he is without faith. This is not what a Christian would say. He says, "You have faith, and I have works. I have provided someone a meal today. I have given someone clothing today. Please show me your faith without works. What good is it if you only talk about these things?" Can you see the meaning in these words? When you read them, you must pay attention to the tone. When you read James, the most important thing is to take note of the tone. If you pay attention to the tone here, you have to admit that this word is spoken to the vain and boastful person. James is speaking here about practice; he is not dealing with justification by faith.

We must take note of the word "show" here. This person says, "Show me," and, "I will show you." Hence, James 2 is not talking about whether or not a man has faith before God. It is not dealing with our faith before God at all; rather, it is dealing with our faith before man. If someone boasts before man that he has faith, you should say to such a one, "Show me your faith without works." James 2 deals with the problem of faith before man. No one can see whether or not you have faith. Others see only if you have works, that is, if you feed others and give others clothes to wear. Do you realize that this requires faith also? Suppose that there is a brother or sister here tonight who lacks clothes or food. If I say to him or her that as long as we believe, we will be clothed and fed, that is not sufficient. James says that we have to feed him and clothe him, and at the same time we should have faith. Do you realize that it takes faith to give to others? This faith comes from two sides. If I do not have much money, perhaps only a few coins in my pocket, and I see someone without food and clothing, I have to exercise faith. I do not need to have faith for others; for them I need works only. But for myself, I need faith. If I do not have faith within me, I will probably not be able to give away these few coins until I have reconsidered and counted them a few more times. I will wonder if I will be able to get back what I would give away. But if I can spontaneously give away the few coins, it must mean that I have faith. Hence, when you see a poor man and give him food and clothing, you must have faith before you can have works. Without works, your faith cannot be manifested. Furthermore, even if you are rich and it does not take much faith for you to give away a little, how do you know that after you have given the money, it would not spoil the receiver and cause him to look to you again the next time to bear his burden? If you do good to others indiscriminately, would it not cause others to look to man continually for help? Many times we do not give something to beggars because we are afraid that doing so would cause them to be beggars forever. Thus, even if you are a rich person, you have to have faith that God can keep a person from developing a bad habit of depending and relying on others. You have to believe that God would not make you bear this person's burden continually. This is a work, but it is a work of faith. It is a work that comes out of faith.

He who makes big promises and speaks empty words appears to have great faith. But actually, he has no faith at all. If you have faith, you should take off your coat and let another put it on. You should invite others to eat your food. If you only talk about faith, you do not have it. Hence, James concluded that this kind of talk is sin. The point here is not that faith is wrong, but that speaking empty words is wrong. Last night we talked about faith. The night before last we also talked about faith. But we have not paid attention to this kind of faith yet. Inasmuch as James was opposed to it, we are opposed to it, too. It is useless to speak empty words.

Verse 19 says, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder." This is a very strong word. You believe that God is one. You do well to believe this. The demons believe this too, but they shudder. Please take note of the word "and." The question today is not whether or not you believe. If you say that you believe, no one can say that you do not. The problem is that even the demons believe. But they do not have peace. The apostles did not write to the demons, saying, "Peace be unto you. May God bless you and the fallen angels with you." Although the demons believe, they shudder. That kind of faith does them no good. Their faith makes them shudder and lose their peace. If you say that you believe, is your believing the kind of believing that the demons have? James's words are very strong and sharp. Undoubtedly, you do believe in God. But the demons believe, too. You say you believe, but at the same time you shudder, fear, and are nervous. Therefore, you are standing on the same ground as the demons. When we read on, we understand what James is against. James is not against faith at all. He is against a certain kind of faith. James is not saying that faith will not justify. He is merely saying that this certain kind of faith will not justify.

In verse 20 James calls these people by their names. He calls them what they are. He does not call them brothers and sisters. He does not call them his beloved, as Paul did; nor does he call them fathers or little children, as John did. Rather, he calls them vain men. "But are you willing to know, O vain man, that faith without its works is useless?" Notice the words "are you willing" here. That James says this proves how hard their attitude is. When others speak God's Word to them and warn them, they still will not believe. Hence, James asks if they are willing to know that this kind of faith is dead. It is not that they are unable to know or that they are unable to be clear. It is not that no one will teach them how to know. It is simply a matter of their not being willing to know. Suppose I try to speak to a brother, and he looks away. When I try again, he looks the other way. When I try a third time, he begins to talk to another brother. I would then say, "Brother, are you willing to listen or not?" This is what James is saying here. Are you willing to know that this kind of faith without works is dead?

When we read the Bible, we have to ask God to show us the circumstances under which the portion was written. James calls this kind of people vain men. They put everything out in the open for others to see and talk about and thus exhibit themselves. They want to have a share in everything. They want to speak up wherever they are. James says that this kind of person must be subdued. O vain man, are you willing to know that this kind of faith is useless? Because they will not listen after he has spoken so much to them, he has to taunt them and shout at them a little.

THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM'S JUSTIFICATION

In verses 21 through 25, two examples are given. Both are very meaningful. They show us what justification by faith really is. Verse 21 says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?" James 2 mentions the case of Abraham. Galatians 3 and Romans 4 also mention the case of Abraham. Paul says that man is justified by faith, not by works, and he uses the case of Abraham as proof. Both Romans 4 and Galatians 3 prove that man is justified by faith rather than by works. James also mentions the case of Abraham, but he uses it to prove that man is justified not only by faith, but by works as well. If he had used other persons, we might not understand this matter. But in mentioning the case of Abraham, we can surely understand what justification by faith really is.

In using the case of Abraham, Paul refers to Genesis 15, whereas James refers to Genesis 22. In Genesis 15 God promised Abraham that his seed would be like the stars in heaven. In Galatians 3, Paul puts strong emphasis on God's promise to Abraham. In the book of Galatians, Paul repeatedly talks about the promise. The word promise is used very frequently in the book of Galatians. Paul uplifts the promise in Galatians.

Do you know what a promise is? In the whole world, there is only one way for man to receive a promise, and that is by faith. There is no other way for a man to receive a promise. There is only this one condition. If God says that we must do something and we do it, it is work. But God did not tell Abraham that He would give him something if Abraham did this or that. Rather, God said that He would give him descendants. How did Abraham receive the promise? There was no other way but by faith. Suppose a brother tells his son that if he memorizes a list of vocabulary words tonight, he will receive five pieces of candy tomorrow. If the son is to receive the five pieces of candy, he has to memorize the words. This is work. But if the brother simply promises his son five pieces of candy, what does his son have to do? Will he say, "I have to do this or that before I can get the candy"? The child does not have to do anything. All he has to do is believe that his father will do it for him. In Genesis 15 God did not give Abraham one single thing to do. It is as if God said, "I will do it for you. I will give you descendants." Abraham believed in God, and that was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Going back to the example of the brother's son, the child may say, "Will my father really give me five pieces of candy? It does not seem like such a good thing could ever happen." If he thinks this way, he does not have faith. Everyone who wants to understand the book of Galatians must realize that a promise is without condition and without work. One does not have to do anything. The Father has done everything. Thank the Lord that everything that God promises He will accomplish. As long as God is trustworthy, everything is fine. Even if one tries to do a work, it will not avail.

In Genesis 15 God promised Abraham that He would give him many descendants. Abraham had everything. But he did not have a son. He had cattle, he had sheep, and he had tents. But he did not have a son. However, Abraham believed God. He believed that God would give him a son. He merely believed God. He did not do any work. In chapter twenty-two, after God had given him a son, He said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (v. 2). Then Abraham got up early in the morning and took his son to Mount Moriah. He laid the wood for the burnt offering on his son Isaac's back, and Isaac bore the wood for the burnt offering, in the same way that the Lord Jesus bore the cross. When they reached the mountain, Abraham built an altar, laid his son on the altar, and was about to kill him. This is the incident that James recounts when he refers to Abraham's justification. In Genesis 15 God's justification of Abraham was related to his son. And in Genesis 22 God's justification of him was also related to his son.

In Genesis 15 Abraham had no son. But he believed in his heart that if God said He would give him a son, he would surely have a son. In chapter twenty-two he did have a son, but God wanted him to offer up this son. If Abraham had not had faith, he would have said, "God, You told me that You would give me many descendants. Now if I kill my son, will I not lose them all? It is

not that I am unwilling to do this; I just want to see Your promise fulfilled. It is not that I dare not do it; I just want to preserve Your faithfulness." Do you think that Abraham's offering of Isaac was a work or an act of faith? What good work is it to kill one's son? What is there to praise about in killing one's own son? That Abraham raised the knife to offer up his son shows that he still believed the promise of chapter fifteen. God had promised to give him many descendants, and to this end He had given him one son. Now if God wanted him to kill this son, it must be that God would raise him up from the dead. This is what Abraham had in mind when he was about to kill his son. His willingness to kill his son shows that he believed that Isaac would be raised from the dead. The faith in Genesis 15 is a faith in Him who calls things not being into being, while the faith in Genesis 22 is a faith in Him who raises people from the dead (Rom. 4:17). In both instances, what Abraham did was not something of work, but of faith. Abraham's act proved that he had faith. This does not mean that Abraham could be justified by killing his son. It means that in pulling out his knife, he proved that he had faith. The proof of Abraham's faith lies in his willingness to offer up his son.

Hence, James did not say that one cannot be justified by faith. Paul says strongly that justification is not by works, but James could not strongly say that justification is not by faith. If the two contradict each other, we would expect one to say, "Justification is of faith, not of works," and the other to say, "Justification is of works, not of faith." But James does not say this. We must not say what James has not said. James does not say that we should not have faith; he says that one should prove his faith with his work. Paul is the one who talks about the principle, so he can boldly declare that justification is of faith and not of works. James is a man of practice. Thus, he says that one must not have faith only, but should have works as well. Only when there are works can a man prove that his faith is genuine. Let us read James 2:21 again: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?" His offering up of his son was a work, and it was this work that proved that he had faith.

Verse 22 says, "You see that faith worked together with his works." Paul is bold to say that one can have faith alone, without works. But James does not dare to say that one should have works alone, without faith. He indicates that the faith in Genesis 15 and the work in Genesis 22 go hand in hand. Then he adds another clause. He does not say that justification comes through faith plus work. Rather, he says, "And by these works faith was perfected." In Genesis 15 we see that because Abraham had faith, he was justified before God. In Genesis 22 we see that because Abraham had works, he was justified before men. Abraham's justification was perfected by his work in Genesis 22. The offering up of Isaac in Genesis 22 manifested the faith in Genesis 15, and the faith in Genesis 15 was perfected by the work in Genesis 22.

In verse 23 our brother James also quotes from Genesis 15. In Romans 4 Paul quotes from Genesis 15 to prove that one needs faith only, not works. Now our brother James quotes the same word that Paul does: "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness.'" In James the word it refers to the act on the mount in Genesis 22. Abraham's offering of Isaac in Genesis 22 was an offering of faith. It was a work that manifested his faith. It was a fulfillment of the words in Genesis 15 that say that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. In Genesis 15 God justified Abraham due to his faith. Abraham's work in Genesis 22 fulfilled God's promise in Genesis 15. Hence, we cannot say that faith alone does not save and that there is the need of works as well.

The condition for salvation is faith, not works. But if there is faith, then spontaneously there will be a change in works.

Suppose there is a man whose occupation is to make paper money to be burned to idols. One day he hears the gospel and believes. But after he believes, he continues to make paper money. Is this wrong? He realizes within that the paper money is for idol worship and that a Christian cannot do such work. If you ask whether or not he believes in the Lord Jesus, he would say yes. But if he gives up his paper money business, how will he support himself? He confesses that he is a Christian, but we cannot say with certainty that he is saved. We do not know if he has been saved before God, if he has faith or not. If we see a person who believes that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God and that He was crucified for him, and believes in the gospel of God fully, yet will not give up such a business for fear that he would lose his livelihood, we have no way to tell if he is actually saved. Perhaps he has faith before God. Though the seed has been sown, the sprout has not yet come out. We can only know with certainty after the leaves come out. I do not say that he is not saved. I say only that we are not certain whether he is saved or not. Here lies the difference. There is no question about being saved by faith. But if no work issues from faith, others will not know about that faith. This is absolutely not a matter of good or bad behavior. Please note this carefully. James 2 is absolutely not on good or bad behavior. The emphasis in James 2 is on the works that prove one's faith. James 2 does not tell us to focus our attention on good works or bad works. What it emphasizes are the works that issue from faith. Many people are very good in their works. But these works do not manifest their faith. These are works without faith; these are not what James was concerned with.

Verse 24 is very good: "A man is justified by works and not by faith only." See how careful James is? He says man is justified by works and not by faith alone. Paul is able to say that man is justified by faith and not by works at all. But James never says that man is justified by works alone and not by faith at all. If he were to say that, we would have to conclude that the two apostles have divergent views on doctrine. James says that man is justified by works. But following that he adds another word, that it is not by faith alone. When one has works, it proves that he has faith. This does not mean that one should have good works only, but that one should have works of faith.

THE EXAMPLE OF RAHAB'S JUSTIFICATION

James was afraid that we would not be clear about the case of Abraham, so in verse 25 we see another illustration. He mentions the case of a prostitute. Rahab was not an honorable woman. There was nothing of merit in her works. Therefore, we see that justification is not a matter of good works, but of works of faith. I have repeated this a few times already. At issue is works of faith, not works of morality. "And in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works in that she received the messengers and sent them out by a different way?" What kind of good works is this? The Israelites were crossing the Jordan River to attack Jericho. If Rahab had been even slightly patriotic, she would have handed over the two spies. But when the king of Jericho sent men to look for them, Rahab hid them upstairs. Later she let them get away. James tells us that this woman's work justified her. What work did she have? Her work was to lie. The men were obviously there, but she said that they were not. Is lying a good work? Every Christian knows that lying is not good. Yet Rahab was justified by her work of lying. If some say that this is justification by works, it is something that they themselves are saying; it is not what James is

saying. They are merely saying in the name of James what they want to say. But what does James himself say? He says that when Rahab let the two men who spied out Jericho get away, it was reckoned to her as righteousness.

What does James mean? When the Israelites left Egypt and went into the wilderness, they could not settle down anywhere, but had to wander for forty years. What good is such a nation? At least there was a wall around Rahab's Jericho. All that the Israelites had was sand under their feet. At least there were houses in Jericho. All that the Israelites had were tents. Even their God had to dwell in a tent. What was so special about such a nation? However, when the two spies came and told her how God had cared for them, performed miracles for them, and had promised that Jericho, and even the whole land of Canaan, would be delivered to them, their words caused Rahab to believe. She put her own future, her life, and even her whole family in their trust. She was even willing to do something against her own country. God does not say that this was a good work; He says that this work was the expression of her faith. If the walls of Jericho had been made of straw or chicken feathers, we might think that the walls could have indeed fallen. But the walls of Jericho were as high as heaven. Its gates were fortified with brass bars. How could it have been taken easily? How could Rahab have committed herself to the two spies? This was a work out of faith, and God says that what justifies a person is this kind of work. It is not a question of good or bad. To have good works is not the issue at all. To have bad works is neither the issue. The flesh is absolutely useless before God. It has no place at all. Every work in Adam, whether good or bad, is rejected by God. If a man tells others that only good works save, such a person does not know what the flesh is. Hence, it is not an issue of works. Good works cannot justify. Neither can bad works.

Hence, James 2 is on works of faith. It is not on anything else. Rahab was there risking her life. If the men sent by the king of Jericho had found the spies in her house, immediately she would have lost her life. But her hope was to be saved through the spies of Israel. She committed her own life and future into their hands. Hence, at issue is not good works or bad works, but having faith or not having faith. It is faith that justifies. Although James says that Rahab was justified by works, her works were but a manifestation of her faith.

Finally, verse 26 says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." Our spirit resides inside our body. Hence, we can say that our spirit is the spirit of our body. We say that evil spirits are spirits that have left their body, for they are without a body. There is a kind of work that requires faith and must be linked to faith. There is a kind of work that comes out from faith and that issues from faith. If faith is without works, it is dead in the same way that a body without a spirit is dead. Hence, we are saved through faith, we are justified through faith, and we also receive life through faith. Although there are many different ways to express faith, the source is still faith. Some express it by forsaking their profession. Others express it by not following in the footsteps of their parents. Still others express it by not going along with their husband in certain things or by forsaking their position. There are all kinds of expressions of faith. The question is not good or bad works, but faith. What James is saying is that when the opportunity arises, our faith should be expressed.

Hence, we cannot say that salvation is of works. Hebrews 6:1 mentions the word of the beginning of the Christ. The foundation of the word of Christ is repentance from dead works. What is repentance from dead works? It is repentance from what we have done when we were dead. In the Bible, there are two things that we have to repent for. One is sin. The other is dead works. Everything that is wrong morally is a sin and a transgression. If a man believes in the Lord, he must surely repent and deal with these sins. Furthermore, we must also hate and repent for what we did as dead persons. What are these dead works? They are all the good works that we were able to do by ourselves before we were saved, before we became the children of God, before we received the new life, and before we became a new race. One sees his sins and transgressions for what they are. But one does not see the things that he considers moral and noble as things to be repented of. God says that these are dead works. They were performed when we were dead. We must repent for all these works, not depending on them for salvation.

When we are saved, there are two great repentances. One is repentance for all the things that should not have been done. But when someone understands the gospel and sees the complete work of the cross of the Son of God, he repents for the other things also, which are all the good works that he has formerly done. Formerly, we tried our best to do good, as if God would save us if He were only impressed enough by our good works. Today, however, we have become Christians. We must not only repent for our sins; we have to repent for our dead works as well. Hence, dead works cannot help us to be saved. You may say that one should believe in the Lord Jesus, but one should also have good works. But God sees you as a torn rag. The righteousness that God gives us far exceeds the righteousness of the law. Hence, if we want to come to God, not only must we not bring our sins along, we also must not bring our works along. If we wish to talk about works, then our works must be as perfect as Christ's are before God, before they can be acceptable.

My friends, you must see that salvation is not of yourselves. You must realize from your heart that everything is of the Lord Jesus. Faith is not a virtue. Faith is just receiving. One of our gospel hymns says, "Working will not save me" and "Weeping will not save me" (#1000 in Hymns, published by Living Stream Ministry). The last stanza says, "Faith in Christ will save me." When I first saw this line, immediately I crossed it out and replaced it with "Jesus alone will save me." Faith is not a virtue. Faith is just to allow the Lord to save us. It is like a person who falls into the sea. When someone comes to save him by throwing him a net, he does not have to do anything. As long as he does not jump out of the net, he will be fine. Everything is done by the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah! I say again, never misunderstand James 2. Work in James 2 is not a question of being good or bad, but of having or not having faith.