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Sermon Notes

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## **How Justified Sinners Display Saving Faith**

**James 2:14-26**

### I. On the Perfection of Scripture and Apparent Contradictions

#### A. Our entire lives are founded on the perfection of Scripture

1. The Word of God is perfect... flawless... unchanging
2. Many Scriptures assert this

*Psalm 18:30 As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless.*

*(Jesus said) John 10:35 the Scripture cannot be broken*

3. This is true because of the doctrine of inspiration of the Scripture writers

*2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*

*2 Peter 1:21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*

4. The mind of God is perfect... he is never confused, never at a loss for words, never needs to backtrack and restate something or correct a mistake or retract a statement

#### B. The Doctrine of Inerrancy is Vital... and a Recent Battleground

1. The idea of inerrancy is that there are no error, no flaws in the Bible

2. If there were... if we were convinced that even 1% of the Bible were flawed, then we would forever be in doubt about ALL of it
3. But liberal theology is founded on the concept that the Bible is a MERELY HUMAN book with MERELY HUMAN opinions about God and humanity and life and death, and therefore, like any other human document subject to errors
4. The “Battle for the Bible” was fought in the 1970s over this very issue... and often opponents of inerrancy trot out mistakes and contradictions they have found in the Bible as proof
5. Our faith depends on the divine origin of the words of the Bible

### C. BUT... Words Are Complex

1. “Seeing through a glass darkly” has to do with words
2. Married couples can testify how easy it is to argue over words
3. Politicians debate endlessly and often seem to be talking right past each other, defining words differently
4. Definitions are slippery but vital... context is king!
  - a. “Complete vs. incomplete”... “Flammable vs. inflammable”
  - b. “Give vs take” ... “Caregiver vs. caretaker”

The movie called “The Sting,” the whole thing was set in the 1930s Chicago, about a con in which a crime boss was conned of his money by a fake off-track gambling site which promised guaranteed money betting on horse races because a Western Union telephone employee delayed the feed to the site enabling them to bet on a race already finished. The information on what race to bet on was given him through a phone call to a nearby phone booth. But the crime boss lost his money when the tipster said the words “Place it on Lucky Dan.” The crime boss misunderstood the word “place” and bet on the horse Lucky Dan to WIN the race... but in horse racing, the word “place” means to finish SECOND. He lost half a million dollars by misunderstanding ONE WORD

## 5. James himself:

- a. Test vs. tempt... same Greek word *peiradzo*! God never TEMPTS us (James 1:13) but he often TESTS us (Hebrews 11:17)
- b. Lust vs. desire... the Greek word for “lust” is *epithumia* and Paul says it is part of the fleshly nature... but he also uses the same Greek word to describe the Spirit’s deep desires within us for God and his glory
- c. Zeal vs. Jealousy... the Greek word is *zelos*... James says we should get rid of all jealousy (James 3:16)

6. God has entrusted the salvation of our souls to the words of Scripture...

7. But that doesn’t mean that Scripture is always perfectly clear on first reading, or doesn’t require careful meditation and skillful handling

***2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles (literally “rightly divides”) the word of truth***

8. The flaw is with US, and not with God’s perfect Word

***Matthew 22:29 "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.***

## D. The Apparent Contradiction Here

***Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from observing the law***

***James 2:24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.***

## E. Martin Luther’s Mistake

- 1. Martin Luther, battling constantly against the medieval Roman Catholic authorities on the issue of justification by faith alone was

hostile to the Book of James and called it “**an epistle of straw**”... basically saying it was worthless

2. But whenever there are APPARENT contradictions in the Bible, the answer is not to question the perfection of the Bible but to work harder to understand it... to harmonize this verse with that verse
3. Every verse of scripture is EQUALLY God-breathed, and therefore in perfect harmony with every other verse of scripture

Charles Spurgeon was once asked how he could reconcile the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty with human responsibility... Spurgeon answered “I wouldn’t try... I never have to reconcile friends! Divine sovereignty and human responsibility have never had a falling out with each other. I do not need to reconcile what God has joined together.”

So it is with every APPARENT contradiction in the Bible... there is in the mind of God a perfect harmony between the truths taught in each passage. My task as a Christian is to find that harmony.

## II. The Crown Jewel of the Gospel: Justification by Faith Alone

### A. The Central Issue of Sinful Humanity is SALVATION

1. All people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God—Romans 3:23
2. God is perfectly holy and threatens each sinner with his righteous judgment against them for rebelling against his laws
3. We could never save ourselves... so God did it by sending his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ
4. Christ was incarnate by the virgin Mary... fully human and fully divine; lived a sinless life, died on the cross as our atoning sacrifice; was raised from the dead on the third day

B. BUT... How Are Sinners Made Right with God? How are they FORGIVEN of their sins and seen by a holy God to be RIGHTEOUS

in his sight? This is the central question the Apostle Paul is seeking to answer in the Book of Romans

C. The Amazing answer of Christianity is JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE apart from works... apart from deeds done by us

***Romans 4:5 To the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness***

***Galatians 2:16 [We] know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.***

***Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.***

D. This Doctrine is the Crown Jewel of the Christian Religion

1. Every other religion offers a form of salvation by works... human effort, good works, etc.
2. Islam is a religion of works... so is Buddhism and Hinduism and all the man-centered cults
3. But Christianity is a religion of faith in someone else's works... the finished work of Jesus Christ's perfect life and atoning death

Martin Luther: "The law says 'Do this!' and it is never done. Grace says 'Believe this man' and everything is done already."

4. Therefore, this doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works of the law is the centerpiece of the gospel... the crown jewel of Christianity

John Calvin: "Wherever the knowledge of [justification by faith] is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished, religion abolished, the Church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown."

BUT... James is addressing a DIFFERENT QUESTION than Paul

### III. The Different Questions Paul and James Are Answering

- A. Paul's Question: How is a sinner made right with a holy God?  
[forgiven... seen as righteous... welcomed into a relationship]
- B. James's Questions: 1) **What kind of faith** saves a sinner? 2) How does that faith display itself in a saved person for the rest of his life?

#### C. Paul Also Had to Address those questions

1. James and Paul are both true teachers of the same gospel and you never need to reconcile friends
2. They both had to address both sides of this equation
3. Paul knew very well that the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from human works was taught it would be slandered and misunderstood
4. In the Book of Romans, at least four times he addresses slanderous accusations made against his doctrine

Paul taught of the overwhelming abundance of grace...

*Romans 5:20 where sin increased, grace increased all the more...*

But then had to address this issue:

*Romans 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*

[In other words, if we're completely saved by grace apart from good works, then why not sin as much as we want?]

Paul addresses that for THREE CHAPTERS—Romans 6-8—teaching the comprehensive doctrine of sanctification, growth in holiness that inevitably follows justifying faith

5. So, both James and Paul are seeking to address the deeper questions... WHAT KIND OF FAITH saves? What does the rest of your life look like if you have been justified by faith?

6. The key for Paul is that people not think that subsequent works are PART TWO of the salvation process... faith in Christ is just the beginning; now you need to add the works of the Law to complete the process
7. That is what the circumcision controversy was all about; the Judaizers were teaching that people had to have two things: 1) faith in Christ Jesus and 2) works of the Law, beginning with circumcision... followed up with all the rest of the Law of Moses
8. Paul taught vigorously that the works of the Law have nothing whatsoever to do with justification, forgiveness of sins, right standing before God
9. Key harmonizing verse:

***Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.***

FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE! Hold onto that... we'll come back to it

IV. Useless Faith, Dead Faith, Unproven Faith, Demon Faith... Do Not Save

A. SO... the questions James is addressing are now clear:

- 1) What kind of faith saves a sinner? 2) How does that faith display itself in a saved person for the rest of his life?

The issue of "What kind of faith" comes up clearly in our text:

***James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?***

B. James Brings Up Four Types of Faith in James 2: useless faith, dead faith, unproven faith, demon faith

1. **Useless faith**... (vs. 14) "What GOOD is it? What does it benefit? How does it profit? What difference does it make?"

***James 2:15-16 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm***

*and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"*

Someone sees a practical need and does nothing to meet that need at all. This is what James is talking about... a USELESS faith. It achieves nothing in this world. He asks again, "What good is it? What benefit comes from it?"

He will say the same thing again in verse 20:

***James 2:20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?***

The word there is "idle, lazy, unemployed" ... as though your faith itself is the SLUGGARD of the book of Proverbs, that can't get out of bed, or lift a piece of bread to his own mouth, who's house is overrun with weeds, who makes excuses for doing nothing all day long. So the Greek word of verse 20... faith the produces no deeds is USELESS... a sluggard faith

James does not want a congregation of so-called "believers" whose faith makes no difference at all in this world.

## 2. Dead faith... (vs. 17)

***James 2:17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.***

- a. James goes even further... he says that faith is not only useless... it is actually a DEAD faith
- b. The issue here is that there is NO LIFE... proving that such a faith does not result in eternal life
- c. A key issue here is that of FRUIT... the result of saving faith is a changed life—internal fruit, yes—holy thoughts and attitudes; but also external action fruit
- d. Again and again, Jesus taught about fruit:

***Matthew 12:33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.***



*John 15:2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.*

*John 15:6 such [fruitless] branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

e. Dead faith produces no fruit because there is no life in it

3. **Unproven faith**... (vs. 18) this is like Missouri... the “show-me” state

*James 2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*

Faith is the eyesight of the soul... by it we see the glory of God in Christ Jesus; but in order for it to be clear from the outside looking in that a person has faith, they have to MOVE MUSCLES... they have to DO SOMETHING... speak words, do actions

If they do nothing, their faith is an INVISIBLE faith; it is not proven, not evident. Their faith has not been proven to be genuine

The cases of Abraham and Rahab that James will bring up in a moment both speak of faith tested and proven as genuine; and that happens only with WORKS

So it may be that James is using the word “justify” differently than Paul

Paul means how a sinner is declared righteous before God

James means how a sinner’s faith is VINDICATED... proved genuine in space and time, and before both God and others

Vindication means to be publicly displayed as righteous, like acquitted and completely exonerated after a show trial

Without works, faith is not vindicated... not completed

#### 4. Demon faith... (vs. 19)

***James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.***

- a. This is a key issue... agreeing with orthodox Christian doctrine does not make someone saved; it is necessary, but not sufficient
- b. The demons have a far better knowledge of the Bible and of doctrine than any of us here
- c. Satan knows the Bible backwards and forwards and can twist it in subtle ways to make people do wicked things that they then justify with twisted scripture references
- d. Demons know all the truths in the Bible... and James says they SHUDDER at them... in other words, they HATE these truths and the God that spoke them!
- e. A demon's heart is utterly repulsed from God, the glorious God, the holy God... they HATE the light and will not come into the light for they are EVIL
- f. This verse also proves that demons do not see God at every moment, for God dwells far above them in another realm... they have to "believe" in God like us
- g. This also proves that getting doctrine right is not enough... we have to LOVE God and all his truth
- h. What demons lack is LOVE!

#### C. In the end it all boils down to two different issues

- 1. Useless faith, dead faith, and unproven faith all lack DEEDS... they have no FRUIT, no ACTIONS in this world
- 2. Demon faith lacks LOVE for God and for his people

#### D. Key Test Harmonizing Paul and James

***Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.***

True faith justifies the sinner, causing the righteousness of Christ to be imputed (credited, reckoned) to the account of that sinner for all time; but true faith also transforms the heart and WORKS through love...

What love? Love for God and love for others...

So, the issue James brings up is clearly addressed:

***James 2:15-16 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?***

So also Jesus' famous statement to the sheep:

***Matthew 25:35-36 I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'***

Jesus is not saying to the sheep, "Because you did these good works of love, your sins have been forgiven." That would be justification by works. But that these acts of sacrificial love was EVIDENCE of the genuine faith they had... in sacrificially loving others, they were by faith loving Christ!

## V. Two Famous Case Studies: Abraham and Rahab

A. James is Speaking of Faith Being VINDICATED... Proved Genuine

B. Case #1: Abraham

***James 2:21-24 Was not our ancestor Abraham justified for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as***

*righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*

1. James knows very well the text in Genesis 15 when God made the promise to Abraham (look up at the stars... so shall your offspring be... Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness)
2. But he knows just as well the later account of God TESTING Abraham's faith when he commanded him "Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love and offer him up as a burnt offering"
3. Abraham's faith-filled OBEDIENCE to the command VINDICATED his faith... proved it to be genuine in space and time

*Genesis 22:10-12 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>12</sup> "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. **Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.**"*

4. When God says "Now I KNOW that you fear God" it lines up with what James is saying... if Abraham had refused to obey God, then his faith could not be completed... proved as genuine
5. Note that James says his faith was MADE COMPLETE by his works
6. It's as though faith is seeking a command to obey in order to prove its genuineness... like a magnet cannot prove its magnetic nature unless there's iron around
7. But every single day we have opportunities to obey God's commands... faith is seeking those opportunities to obey

C. Case #2: Rahab

***James 2:25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?***

1. Rahab believed in her heart that the God of the Hebrews was the true God and that the Jews would most certainly conquer Jericho and the whole Promised Land

***Joshua 2:9-11 "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. <sup>10</sup> We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. <sup>11</sup> When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.***

2. Her actions in hiding the spies and sending them safely off in a different direction was rooted in this faith
3. BUT if she had done NOTHING for them, they would never have made a promise to save her and her family from the Jewish destruction of Jericho that was coming
4. Her actions vindicated her faith and saved her life
5. In the same way, faith is vindicated in the Christian's life by a consistent pattern of obedience to God's commands by the power of the Holy Spirit

To sum up:

How is a sinner made right with a holy God and enabled to have an eternal love relationship with him? By faith in Christ alone apart from any works we can do.

Once a person has been justified by faith, how does that faith demonstrate its reality and vitality in the life of that person until the day they die? By works Christ has commanded done with a loving heart.

## VI. Applications

A. Come to Christ!

B. Understand the Relationship Between Justification and Sanctification

C. Look at Your Own Life: is there a patterns of sacrificial service and good works based on obedience to Scripture?