

James 2:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

Analysis

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? James asks, "What profit" (ophelos, ὄφελος) if someone says he has faith (pistin, πίστιν) but lacks works (erga, ἔργα)? Can that faith save him? The rhetorical answer is no: a profession devoid of obedience is counterfeit. The issue is not faith plus works but the nature of saving faith—it inevitably produces works.

Reformed theology distinguishes justified-by-faith-alone from a dead faith. James aligns with Paul by opposing empty confessions that bear no fruit. True faith unites with Christ and thus shares His life, expressing itself in love.

Historical Context

Early believers faced misinterpretations of Paul's teaching that faith frees from obedience. James corrects antinomian tendencies spreading among diaspora congregations. His language mirrors Paul's in Galatians 5:6 and Ephesians 2:8-10, showing harmony rather than contradiction.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Where might your profession of faith be unaccompanied by action?
2. How does this verse challenge cheap grace assumptions?
3. What concrete work of obedience should flow from your faith today?

Interlinear Text

Tí	τὸ	ὅφελος	ἀδελφοί	μου	ἐὰν	πίστις	λέγη	τις	
What	G3588	doth it profit	brethren	my	though	faith	say	a man	
	G5101		G3786	G80	G3450	G1437	G4102	G5100	
ἔχῃ	ἔργα	δὲ	μὴ	ἔχῃ	μὴ	δύναται	ἢ	πίστις	σῶσαι
have	works	and	not	have	not	can	G3588	faith	save
	G2192	G2041	G1161	G3361	G2192	G3361	G1410	G4102	G4982
αὐτόν									
him									
	G846								

Additional Cross-References

Luke 6:49 (Parallel theme): But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

Titus 1:16 (Parallel theme): They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

2 Peter 1:5 (Faith): And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

Hebrews 11:17 (Faith): By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

James 2:26 (Faith): For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Hebrews 13:9 (Parallel theme): Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

Galatians 5:6 (Faith): For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

James 2:18 (Faith): Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Acts 8:21 (Parallel theme): Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Matthew 5:20 (Parallel theme): For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.