

James 2:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Analysis

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? James addresses the foolish man (anthrōpe kene, ἄνθρωπε κενέ), asking if he wants to know that faith without works is barren (argos, ἀργός). The adjective means idle or useless. Empty claims need rebuke; James confronts complacency head-on.

Reformed theology values pastoral admonition: mere assent without obedience is vanity. James's sharp tone signals the danger of lifeless faith.

Historical Context

Antinomian tendencies threatened early churches, prompting strong apostolic correction (cf. Jude 4). James, shepherding diaspora believers, uses wisdom literature's bluntness to awaken sleepers. Paul's questions in Romans 6 mirror this rhetorical style.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Where do you need a wake-up call regarding idle faith?
2. Who has permission to confront you about hypocrisy?
3. How will you respond to James's rebuke with repentance?

Interlinear Text

θέλεις	δὲ	γινῶναι	ὃ	ἄνθρωπε	κενέ	ὅτι	ἡ	πίστις
wilt	But	thou know	O	man	vain	that	that	faith
G2309	G1161	G1097	G5599	G444	G2756	G3754	G3588	G4102
χωρὶς	τῶν	ἔργων	νεκρά	ἐστιν				
without	works	dead	is					
G5565	G3588	G2041	G3498	G2076				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 12:11 (Parallel theme): He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.

James 2:17 (Faith): Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

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

Romans 1:21 (Parallel theme): Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.