

Works as Evidence of Faith



Witnessing Window

An Illustration

The scene is a local police office. A young boy stands in front of the police sergeant. His bike had been stolen and he believes the police may have recovered it. The sergeant says "Is this your bike?" The boy says "Yes, this is my bike". The sergeant replies "Well, I need evidence that this is your bike." The boy hands the sergeant a receipt that shows the name of the boy's dad, the store at which the bike was purchased, and the model and serial numbers of the purchased bike. The sergeant takes a moment to examine the evidence and checks the serial number on the bike. He replies "Yes, I can see that you told the truth. You may take your bike."

But what if the sergeant was God? Would he have needed the boy's receipt to know if he was telling the truth? No, God is all knowing. He would know the bike belonged to the boy without evidence. The boy only needs the evidence to justify to a man that the bike is his.

Summary:

1. The boy claimed the bike was his.
2. The evidence showed the boy's claim to be true.
3. After the sergeant judged the boy's evidence, he knew the boy's claim was true.
4. The boy's bike was returned to him because his claim that the bike belonged to him was true.
5. God, being all knowing, would not need such evidence to know whether the bike belonged to the boy.



Works act as Evidence of Faith

This story illustrates a relationship between faith and works. Just as the receipt acted as evidence that the boy spoke the truth when he said the bike was his, so do works act as evidence of the truth when someone says they have faith in God. But it is only man that needs such evidence to judge the truth of another's claim to faith, God does not. God knows if one's claim to faith is true without evidence. James makes this same relationship between faith and works. This relationship can be seen two ways:

- Works are evidence of living faith
- Living faith is always accompanied by works.

Read **James 2:14-26**

<p>James 2:14-26 (NIV) What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.</p> <p>¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."</p> <p>Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.</p> <p>²⁰ You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ 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. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.</p> <p>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? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.</p>	<p>James 2:14-26 (KJV) What <i>doth it</i> profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what <i>doth it</i> profit? ¹⁷Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ¹⁸Yea, 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. ¹⁹Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. ²⁰But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? ²²Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? ²³And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. ²⁴Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. ²⁵Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent <i>them</i> out another way? ²⁶For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.</p>
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In this section of scripture, James is making the argument that if someone claims to have faith, but there is nothing (no works) that proceeds from this faith, then that faith is dead, that is; it is useless for eternal life (verse 17). In verse 18 James set the context of one man judging another man's claim to faith. He does this by referring to two men; a man claiming faith but with no works and himself. He makes the point that we may use a man's works as evidence his claim to have faith is true.

James uses Abraham as an example. In verse 23 he quotes the scripture that says that Abraham's belief in God, that is his faith; is credited to him as righteousness. It is the same with all true believers. We are declared righteous because of our faith. The boy in the story above got his bike back because it belonged to him. But how do we know Abraham's faith was real? Just as the receipt acted as evidence of the boy's claim, Abraham's action of being willing to sacrifice Isaac acts as evidence to us of his faith in God (verse 21).



But this evidence was not needed by God. In **Genesis 15:6** we read that God credited Abram's faith to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:6 (NIV) Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.	Genesis 15:6 (KJV) And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.
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This was before God changed Abram's name to Abraham, and BEFORE Abraham's great works of faith. James point is that we (mankind) can judge Abraham's faith by his works. He states this as a general point in verse 24, that one person may judge another person's claim to faith by their actions. But James does not say that God needed Abraham's works to credit his faith to him as righteousness.

James' powerful conclusion in this section is given in verse 26. If someone claims to have faith, but there is no evidence of that faith (works), then they do not really have faith (their faith is dead). Since we are saved (given eternal life) by our faith such a person is not saved. His claim is just empty words.

This section of scripture is misused by Mormons. In particular, they say that in verse 24 James is saying that God requires works as well as faith in order to gain eternal life. By using the above illustration of the stolen bike and explanation of James 2:14-26, we can establish the proper relationship between faith and works.

