



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Faith That Works - 2

About the Resurrection

*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
~ 1 Corinthians 15.17*

“Why, oh why, isn’t the resurrection shouted out in our churches every Sunday? This is the good news I’ve been looking for for so long. I had always thought the good news was the forgiveness of sins—and it didn’t make much sense and certainly I wasn’t very grateful. This is far, far more!”

~ Michael Green, *Running from Reality: Is Christianity Just Another Escape* (InterVarsity Press, 1983), 59; from a letter re: a previous book

“Historicity is a theological issue for Luke as well. He affirms in the prologue of his Gospel that the events recounted can be traced back to eyewitnesses, so his readers can have certainty about the doctrines which they have been taught (Luke 1:1-4). To pose historical questions is therefore at the same time to pose theological questions; ultimately the two cannot be separated.”

~ Brandon D. Crowe, *The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles* (Baker Academic, 2020), 7

“The resurrection validates the uniqueness of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:4). His rising from the dead substantiates his claims (Rom. 1:3-4). He is unlike any other teacher there has ever been.” ~ Michael Green, “What If He Didn’t Rise?” *Christianity Today*, March 17, 1989, 31

So You Say You Have Faith?

David Anguish

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith . . . ?” (James 2.14)

In defining genuine faith, we should insist on Scripture’s meaning, not popular cultural definitions¹ or those given by critics of religion.² We should also work through the nuances in Scripture’s presentation of faith. Is it believing in, believing that, trusting, or having confidence based on testimony?

In view of what we see in Scripture, we answer, “Yes—and then some.” We also affirm that, once we get past the lenses that have colored debates about James 2.14-26 since the Reformation³ and look directly at the text, we’ll see the components found in all examples of genuine faith.⁴

First, genuine faith rests on *knowledge of God*. Verse 19 assumes the idea of confidence in faith’s nature presented in Hebrews 11.1 (see [part 1](#)) as James commends those who profess to “believe that God is one” (cf. Deut 6.4). But, while he says they “do well” to say that, he hastens to add that such a confession is not all there is to faith. In the first place, “even the demons believe [that much]—and shudder!” Furthermore, Abraham, who “believed God” (v. 23; from Gen 15.6), went beyond profession to demonstrate his faith. His declaration of belief was vindicated—the sense in which “justified” (δικαιῶω; *dikaioō*) is used in this text—“when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar” (v. 21).

Second, because Abraham knew God, he *trusted God*. Thus, when God told him to offer Isaac on the altar, he set out for Moriah (Gen 22). We learn how he arrived at that trust from Genesis 12-21. Because those chapters take up only about ten pages in our Bibles and can be read in a relatively brief amount of time, we can forget that they recount 40 years, or more, of Abraham’s life.⁵ During those years, he was growing in his knowledge of God’s nature and ways (see e.g., Gen 18.22-33, esp. 25). Thus, when told to sacrifice the son God had promised would be *the heir*, Abraham “reasoned” that God

Resurrection, cont.

“The question of Jesus’ resurrection lies at the heart of the Christian faith. There is no form of early Christianity known to us . . . that does not affirm at its heart that after Jesus’ shameful death God raised him to life again.... It is woven into the very structure of Christian life and thought.” ~ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Understanding Who Jesus Was and Is* (InterVarsity Press, 1999), 126

“The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of Christian faith; it is that without which Christianity is no longer Christianity. . . . As important as Jesus’ teaching is, it is not his teaching that is the essence of Christianity but his resurrection from the dead. Faith in Christ is not simply faith in his teaching; it is faith in God who raised him from the dead. ~ Frank J. Matera, *Resurrection: The Origin and Goal of the Christian Life* (Liturgical Press, 2015), 10-11

“In the current view, religion is not an issue of knowledge, of what the facts are, but of faith, of what is believed. This notion of the Resurrection as ‘existential meaning-making’ makes its actual occurrence irrelevant. . . . Thus the factuality of the Resurrection is deserted, . . .” ~ David Beck, “Preface” to Gary R. Habermas & Antony G. N. Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate* (Harper & Row, 1987), ix

“So, as far as the New Testament is concerned, there is a great deal at stake in the question of whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead: the very validity of the Christian faith. And it is more than a bit ironic that so many professed Christians today fail to grasp this aspect of the gospel.” ~ James T. South, *Just Jesus: The Evidence of History* (DeWard Publishing Company, 2012), 121

would raise Isaac (Heb 11.19 NIV). Significantly, in other texts where he mentions faith, James assumes his readers will exhibit the same kind of implicit trust (cf. 1.3, 6; 5.15).

Third, genuine faith includes being *active for God*. In offering Isaac, Abraham’s faith was vindicated “by works” (ἔργον; *ergon*); without those works, his faith was not complete (vv. 21-22). “In the same way,” Rahab was vindicated by her works (v. 25). Neither was vindicated by “faith alone” (v. 24)—in context, the faith characteristic of the demons.

As with trust, it is again significant that James assumes its activity component in his other references to faith. We are to meet trials with joy, knowing that tested faith “produces endurance” (1.2-3 NRSV). When seeking wisdom, we “ask in faith,” knowing that God gives “generously and ungrudgingly” (1.5-7 NRSV). As doers, not merely hearers, of God’s word (1.22), we act in line with our “faith . . . in the Lord of glory.” Thus, without partiality, we value others as the image-bearing beings they are, especially those who are devalued and neglected by the world at large (1.26-27; 2.1).

James 2.14-26 thus undermines the popular notion that acceptance of the truth of certain doctrines is the entirety of genuine faith. In the words of Dan McCartney, “In a day when people often confuse justification by faith with justification by *profession of faith*, we do well to hear James’s concern.”⁶

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Notes

¹ See, for example, the nine different definitions of the noun at the top of the page in *Dictionary.com*, s. v. “faith,” accessed March 29, 2022, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/faith>.

² See citations in previous issues, [here](#) and [here](#).

³ Note that the alleged conflict between James and Romans that has prompted so much debate in the West was virtually non-existent in the East. Commentaries by Origen and Cyril (3rd/4th cent.) used James 2 to *explain* Romans 3-4. And a thousand years before Luther, “Severus [ca. 465-538] concludes that Paul agrees with James, citing Gal 5:6, ‘Faith working through love’” as proof. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 37A (Doubleday, 1995), 134-135.

⁴ In 108 verses in James, “faith” (πίστις, *pistis*) and “believe” (πιστεύω; *pisteuō*) appear 19 times; 5 are outside of 2.14-26.

⁵ Abram/Abraham was 75 when he left Haran (Gen 12.4) and 100 when Isaac was born (Gen 21.5). No text specifies Isaac’s age in Genesis 22, but he was old enough to process and discuss what was occurring with his father, and strong enough to carry the wood to the place of the sacrifice (22.6-7). Of interest is that Josephus said he was 25 (*Antiquities* 1.227).

⁶ Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Academic, 2009), 279. The components seen in Jas 2 are consistent in all biblical examples of genuine faith. See, e.g., the stories of the people mentioned in Heb 11; see also 2 Tim 1.12 (conviction, trust, suffering).

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