

Mercy vs. Judgement (James 2:13)

[13] For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Not only do we reap what we sow, but we also don't reap what we don't sow. That is, if mercy is not sown to fellow humans then mercy, of which we could all use a generous helping, will not be reaped at the Judgement Seat of Christ. Even though we have already obtained undeserved mercy through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we can obtain additional mercy in the form of rewards by doing works of obedience and mercy to our fellow humans, especially in sharing the gospel of grace. But if we do not show mercy to others, then God will not be merciful to us at the Judgement Seat of Christ, and therefore judge us for not doing works of mercy.

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

By God's grace we are saved from His condemnation and abiding wrath through our faith [Eph 2:8]. Therefore James is not speaking of salvation here. Rather, he is speaking of being saved from God's judgement at the Judgement Seat of Christ for our lack of mercy to others. Mercy and rewards are dispensed at the Judgement Seat of Christ on the basis of our works of obedience and mercy and love, not on the basis of faith. That is, faith alone cannot save anyone from the judgement of not doing works of mercy. The only thing that can save us from that judgement is to actually do works of mercy.

[15] If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, [16] And 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 doth it profit?

Who does not profit? Both parties. It certainly doesn't profit the person in need of help. And it does not profit the person who was able to help. So for his lack of mercy, he will not be shown mercy at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

[17] Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

In order for faith to be useful it must be accompanied by works. By itself, faith cannot help anyone, and is therefore "dead" to mercy. Christ had faith in His Father. But had He not been obedient and put Himself on the cross, His faith would not have done the world any good at all. Christ demonstrated His faith to His Father by His work of obedience and mercy on the cross.

[18] 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.

Here in the midst of one hypothetical example of faith without works [v15-17] and two real life examples of faith with works [v21, 25], James is teaching that faith in Christ must be accompanied by works. We can often observe that a weak faith produces hardly any works, while a strong faith can produce bold works that glorify the Lord [2Cor 5:7]. We should always be aware that works which glorify the Lord will bring mercy and rewards, while no works or works which only glorify ourselves will bring no mercy at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

[19] Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. [20] But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Vain, in the sense that we are just fooling ourselves if we think that we will get heavenly rewards and escape God's judgement by relying strictly on our faith and not any works of mercy. This is a reiteration of v.17 with the emphasis on being foolish for not growing in faith and doing good works. Examples of lively faith with works follow.

[21] Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Abraham's faith justified God's grace in imputing His righteousness to Abraham. But Abraham's obedience in attempting to perform the sacrifice of his only son justified (or proved) his faith to God.

Genesis 22:10-12

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. [11] And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. [12] And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

The angel of the Lord, speaking for God, said, “now I know...” By being obedient in attempting to perform the sacrifice of his son Isaac, Abraham proved (or justified) his faith in God. Abraham was not trying to show his faith in God to his son Isaac, who was the only other person there. Rather, he was showing God of his faith in Him. It was not a work of mercy, but rather a work of faith and obedience.

[22] Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? [23] And 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. [24] Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Again, Abraham’s faith in God justified God’s granting Abraham His righteous. But Abraham’s work of obedience justified his faith in God. So, faith justifies and works justifies – only the sources and meanings of justification are different. God justifies His gift of salvation to the person who has faith in His Son, while man justifies his faith in Jesus by doing works of obedience and mercy and charity (a derivative of love).

[25] Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

Rahab, hearing of the might and power and mercy of the God of Israel, how He brought them out of slavery in the land of Egypt and how Israel’s God was with them in defeating all enemies round about, knew that her city was about to be given over to the children of Israel [Joshua 2]. So Rahab performed an act of kindness and mercy by hiding the spies, in return for mercy being shown to her and her family when her city would be destroyed. This act of mercy did not save Rahab and her family from God’s eternal wrath. She and her family would have to have their own faith in God for that. But it did justify her fear of the LORD, that He was the only God, just as Abraham’s work did, and that He was able to save her family from destruction.

[26] For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Conclusion: Just as the spirit gives life to the body, so also works gives life to faith. Faith that is not accompanied by works is a faith that disobeys v1:22 to be doers of the word. And faith without works will result in judgement [v2:13] and loss of rewards, even though the believer will be saved from God’s abiding wrath [1Cor 3:15]. Let us therefore really be a kind of firstfruits that is called for in v1:18 by being merciful to others, especially in sharing the gospel so that they also can be saved. Let us have the dual motivation for doing good works by obeying God and obtaining merciful rewards at the Judgement Seat of Christ and into the Millennium.

Questions?
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Comments? Concerns?
Rom 1:16; Ps 103

Criticisms?

06/07/2008