

## What Some People Do With James 2:24

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by Bill Crews

*The passage reads: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."*

This is the conclusion that James wants the reader to draw (or see) from all James had said prior to this (verses 14-23). "A man," any man, is justified by a faith that **works** (or obeys God as did Abraham), **not** by faith only, and **not** by works only either. Some try to make James 2:24 read: "You, by seeing or observing a man's works, thereby know that he has already been justified by faith only."

Baptist preachers and others, who believe in justification by faith only or at the point of faith, attempt to refute the obvious meaning of the verse by emphasizing the word "see," making it mean "observe with the eyes," and concluding that James is really saying that by observing or seeing a man's works or obedience to God's commandments, you can know and conclude that he has already and truly been justified by his faith that preceded his works. Works of this passage, to them, is evidence of an already justified man, evidence that "you see" with your eyes, and not a condition of justification.

This is a twisting of the passage, convoluted reasoning. This is not what James wanted his readers to "see." James wanted his readers "to get a clear mental impression of; grasp by thinking; understand" (one definition of the Greek word translated "see"). He's talking about seeing with the mind, understanding, comprehending the point he is making. Just read the whole context: James 2:14-26 and you will "see" his point. In the Bible "see" is often used of seeing or viewing with the physical eyes. But it is also used in many passages in other ways, as it is in James 2:24. For example:

*"See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:5, quoting Exodus 25:40) The meaning of "see" is "make sure."*

*"So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:19). The meaning of "see" is "understand."*

*"And I fell at his feet to worship Him. But he said to me, 'See that you do not do that. . . .'" (Revelation 19:10) Again, the meaning of "see" is "make sure."*

We commonly use such expressions as: "Do you see what I'm saying?" or "Can't you see my point?" or "I think I can see the meaning now." In these senses a blind person can "see." *Young's Concordance* defines the word used in James 2:24 and translated "see" "to see, discern, take heed." The word is *HORAO*, which *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* not only defines the word like this: "1. to see with the eyes," but also like this: "2. to see with the mind, to perceive, know," and he gives James 2:24 of an instance of the word having that meaning.

To sum up, the "works" of James 2:14-26 are throughout works of obedience to God's commandments or requirements. It is a faith that works or obeys, not faith alone, that saves. From all that James has put forth in verses 14-23, he wants the reader to see or understand that by works (but not works only) a man is justified or that by a faith that works, and not by faith only, a man is justified.

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