

# James 2:14-17 Commentary

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**James 2:14** [What use](#) is it, my [brethren](#), [if someone says](#) he [has faith](#) but he [has no works](#)? [Can](#) that [faith save](#) him? ([NASB: Lockman](#))

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**Greek:** [Ti to ophelos. adelphoi mou. ean pistin lege](#) (3SPAS) [tis echein.](#) (PAN) [erga de me eche?](#) (3SPAS) [me dunatai](#) (3SPPI) [e pistis sosai](#) (AAN) [auton?](#)

**Amplified:** What is the use (profit), my brethren, for anyone to profess to have faith if he has no [good] works [to show for it]? Can [such] faith save [his soul]? ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?

**NLT:** Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Now what use is it, my brothers, for a man to say he "has faith" if his actions do not correspond with it? Could that sort of faith save anyone's soul? ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** What profit is there, my brethren, if a person is saying, I am in possession of faith, and he is not in possession of works? The aforementioned faith is not able to save him, is it?

**Young's Literal:** What is the profit, my brethren, if faith, any one may speak of having, and works he may not have? is that faith able to save him?

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Before you read (and are biased) by the following notes, let me strongly encourage you to read **James 2:14-26** through on your own asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate your study. Read it through several times, the first time to simply get a general sense of the subject/theme. Then read it again, this time circling the key words (usually works repeated, although not always). What are the key words in this passage. I would suggest you will find at least 3 key words (or synonyms), two are repeated many times and the third is not found as frequently but is a strategically important word (and for that reason it is a key word). From this key words can you discern the "theme" of this section? What is James' repeated emphasis? What is he trying to explain to his readers? More specifically is James trying to tell his readers how to become saved? Now that you have pondered this passage on your own, you are ready to read the following notes in a "critical" (discerning) manner.

## JAMES: A RIGHT STRAWY EPISTLE

**James 2:14-26** is the main reason Martin Luther although not questioning its canonicity, did find the epistle of James to be "a right strawy epistle" and for this reason relegated it to an appendix of his Bible! Luther questioned the usefulness of James because it said so little about justification by faith, but instead emphasized works as it dealt more with the practical aspects of Christian conduct and described how faith works itself out in everyday life. Luther's negative evaluation appears to be brought to a crescendo in his debate in Leipzig in 1519 where his Roman Catholic opponent, Johann Maier of Eck, used James 2:17 ("Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.") to argue against Luther's position of **salvation by faith alone apart from works**. It is unfortunate that Luther was sucked into Maier's proof texting method of reasoning. As we study this controversial passage the good inductive student will begin to see the inestimable value of considering the context (immediate paragraphs, the other 5 chapters and finally the teaching of the remainder of the NT). "Yanking" a single text out of it's context to yield a proof text is the common modus operandi of skeptics, false and/or deceived teachers and cultists. As is often said, these godless men major on the minors. And thus it behooves all believers to be thoroughbred "Bereans" (see note Acts 17:11), so that they are not duped by such spiritual sleight of hand. If a spiritual giant such as **Martin Luther** could fall prey to such techniques, then certainly we must all be aware of our vulnerability. It follows that even as you read the notes on this difficult section of Scripture, the discerning reader is encouraged to filter what is written through the grid of the whole counsel of God's Word under the leadership of the Teacher, the Holy Spirit. John reminds us that as believers, we...

have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know... And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1 John 2:20, 27)

So John was reminding his readers that they had an anointing which in context refers to the Holy Spirit, Who would be their ultimate and final guide in discerning between truth and error. John is not saying we are to abandon all human teachers, for the whole counsel of God's Word, instructs us on the need for Spirit filled men with the gift of teaching (e.g., see the practice of the early church in Acts 2:42, 13:1, cp Ep 4:11, 12, 13, 14- notes on Ep 4:11; 12; 13; 14)

As background remember the audience to whom **James** addresses his letter...

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the **twelve tribes** who are **dispersed abroad**, greetings. (James 1:1)

The phrases "**twelve tribes**" (cp "[twelve tribes](#)" - the Jews) and "**dispersed abroad**" (cp "[the dispersion](#)" - those away from Jerusalem and scattered around the Roman empire) indicate that this epistle was addressed primarily to a Jewish audience, the very ones who constituted the first Christian church (a truth Gentile believers today often forget).

Furthermore, James wrote to readers who were experiencing trials as indicated by his opening exhortation to...

**Consider** it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (**James 1:2-4**) (**Comment:** This opening statement regarding faith implies that the intended audience was believing Jews, Jewish Christians. Dearly beloved of God, are you going through a trial [singular or plural] as you read these words? Then take heart, James is a book you will want to study diligently to know what God says about how believers can weather trials, which are inevitable. God wants to equip you to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, whatever that shadowy trial might be, not by yourself and not as simply a survivor, but as more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus. The truth in James will equip you for this journey!)

Regarding the status of his readers as to whether they were saved or unsaved, James went on to describe the audience as those Jews who had been **born again** (see esp Jn 3:3, 4, 5f) writing in James 1...

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth (What would be another name? Surely this is

a synonym in context for the gospel - Ro 1:16-note), so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures. (**James 1:18**)

As an aside as **Morris** says...

It is a fascinating testimony to God's grace that James, who had been an unbelieving brother of Jesus, was chosen to write the first inspired book to believing Jews (**Ed**: circa AD 45-49, 49 being the date of the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:1ff), and Paul, the chief persecutor of the early church, was chosen to write the first epistle to believing Gentiles. (**Comment**: Amazing grace that saves and uses wretches like all of us were in Adam! Amen? Amen!)

And so here in James 2 feels compelled by the Holy Spirit to deal with a crucial topic, the relationship of faith to works. How does faith work?

Earlier James had alluded to the delusion of hearing without doing challenging his readers (and all of us) to...

prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. (see note James 1:22)

**WHAT USE IS IT MY BRETHREN IF SOMEONE SAYS HE HAS FAITH BUT HE HAS NO WORKS? CAN THAT FAITH SAVE HIM?:** Ti to ophelos, adelphoi mou, ean pistin lege (3SPAS) tis echein, (PAN) erga de me eche? (3SPAS) me dunatai (3SPPI) e pistis sosai (AAN) auton?:

- James 2:16; Jeremiah 7:8; Romans 2:25; 1 Corinthians 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 13:9
- James 2:18,26; 1:22-25; Matthew 5:20; 7:21-23,26,27; Luke 6:49; Acts 8:13,21; 15:9; 1 Corinthians 13:2; 16:22; Galatians 5:6,13; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:5; Titus 1:16; 3:8; Hebrews 11:7,8,17; 2 Peter 1:5; 1 John 5:4,5
- 1 Corinthians 15:2; Ephesians 2:8-10)
- [James 2 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries (includes multiple journal articles on faith)
- [James 2:14-19 Saving Faith: Genuine or False?](#) - Steven Cole
- [James 2:14-26 Dead Faith, Part 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [James 2:14-20: Dead Faith](#) - John MacArthur
- [Saved by Faith \[Alone\] in Paul Vs Not Saved by Faith Alone in James](#) - Robert Stein
- [Faith, Works, and the Christian Religion in James 2:14-26](#) - Mark Proctor

Notice how James uses the technique of **asking questions** in six of the 13 verses.

**James 2:14-26** speaks to the major issue that spawned the Reformation, the reformers teaching that man is **justified by faith** alone whereas the established church taught man is **justified by faith plus works**.

Here are some key observations in James 2:14-26. Observe that the **key words** in **James 2:14-26** is **faith** (or believe) used some 15 times (including one pronoun, "itself" 2:17) and works, which is used some 12 times. Most of the uses of faith and works are related to each other. Only once does James mention **salvation** per se. Although James does use **justified** (dikaioo) 3 times, note that there are no other uses of **dikaioo** in this epistle (used in James 2:21, 24, 25) in contrast to Paul's writings in which he uses **dikaioo** 27 times. Even from these simple observations, it follows that if we want to understand what the NT teaches on **justification** we need to study Paul's uses rather than James 3 uses in this one section. In addition, as we will discuss later that James uses the verb **dikaioo** with a distinct and different meaning from most of Paul's uses. In summary, just observing the key words in **James 2:14-26** one can conclude that his major theme in this controversial section is **faith**, not **salvation**.

James 2:14-20

Describes dead faith (including "demonic" faith)

James 2:21-26

Describes dynamic, living, useful faith giving three illustrations

James' objective is to answer the question **"What is genuine, saving faith?"**. This question makes James 2:14-26 one of the most vitally important sections of Scripture because the truth James explains deals directly with a person's eternal destiny. The most frightening deception in this life is to think that **"I possess saving faith"** when in fact in God's eyes it is not genuine saving faith.

**Hiebert** explains that...

The rhetorical questions of verse 14 state the theme of this third test of faith. James insists that **living faith** will **authenticate** itself in the **production of works**. There is no antagonism between faith and works. They

are not totally distinct concepts but rather two inseparable elements in salvation. James insists that **"works are not an 'added extra' to faith, but are an essential expression of it."** In this passage James is echoing the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 7:21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27. ([Commentary on James](#))

Jesus spoke some of the most frightening words ever uttered at the end of His Sermon on the Mount to those who surely thought they were saved (e.g., they called Him "Lord, Lord") declaring...

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS. (See notes Matthew 7:21; 22; 23)

To reiterate, James is concerned that his readers understand the nature of genuine, saving faith so that they do not have to hear those fateful words from the Judge of all men...

**"I never knew you.  
Depart from Me!"**

As **D Edmond Hiebert** says...

A **saving faith** is a **working faith**, proving its vitality by its production of works... The Epistle of James has much to say about **faith**. The noun **faith pistis** (see word study) occurs sixteen times and the verb **believe pisteuo** (see word study) three times. But a glance at the contents of the epistle makes it obvious that James is not concerned with developing a theological exposition of the nature of Christian faith. He holds that a saving faith accepts Jesus Christ as the all-sufficient Savior (James 1:1; 2:1), but otherwise he says but little about the theological content of such a faith. His purpose is **practical** rather than **doctrinal**.

**The purpose of James is to goad his readers to recognize and accept their need for a living, active faith and to challenge them to test their own faith by the basic criterion that "faith without works is useless"** (James 2:20). James insists that a saving faith is a living faith, proving its genuineness by what it does. But it is a misconception to assume that his purpose is simply to stress the importance of good works. James is not advocating works apart from faith, but he is vitally concerned to show that a living faith must demonstrate its dynamic character by its deeds.

The contents of the epistle, further, make it clear that James is not content simply to establish the abstract truth that a saving faith is a dynamic, productive faith. His purpose is practical, to present a series of tests whereby his readers can determine the genuineness of their own faith. **"The testing of your faith"** (James 1:3) seems to be the key which James left hanging at the front door, intended to unlock the contents of the book. This writer proposes that tests of a living faith is indeed the unifying theme of the epistle and that it provides ready access to its contents...

In James 1:2-18 James states and discusses his theme. This paragraph is basic to a proper understanding of the thrust of the epistle. For James **"faith,"** the subject of his opening sentence (James 1:2-), is central to the Christian life and its true energizing principle. It is essential, therefore, that its genuineness be tested. **"The testing of your faith"** (James 1:3) marks the basic thrust of the message. The Greek noun **peirasmos** (word study) has a double meaning, "testing" and "temptation." Since in human experience the two aspects are often related, James discusses both in this opening section. In James 1:2-12 he deals with the tests and trials of believers, while in James 1:13, 14, 15, 16 he discusses the nature of temptation and then shows that it cannot come from God in view of His beneficent activities in human experience (James 1:17-18).

In order to profit from the testings of their faith, believers must rightly evaluate their testings (James 1:2, 3, 4). Prayer makes available to them the needed wisdom to profit from their testings (James 1:5); but such prayer must be unmixed with doubt and hesitancy (James 1:6-8). The testing of their faith equalizes believers (James 1:9, 10, 11), and successful endurance assures future reward (James 1:12). (Hiebert - [The Unifying Theme of the Epistle of James Bibliotheca Sacra 135:539 Jul 1978](#)) (Bolding added for emphasis)

James is **not** raising a question about whether one is **saved by faith alone** (this is Paul's emphasis), but he is dealing with the question of what is genuine or **true saving faith**?

**What use is it?** - Literally James asks "What the profit"? Clearly he is challenging his readers to think about what would be the gain (as it relates to salvation which becomes clear in the second question) from the situation he then presents - faith that has no works.

Use (3786) (**ophelos** from **ophello** = to heap up, to increase, to accumulate or benefit) means an advantage or some benefit derived. Talk is cheap. The advantage or profit in talking about helping is only realized when we follow through with action.

**My brethren** - In context this suggest James' tenderness and concern for in dealing with this vital matter. James of course hopes that they will not be like the people pictured.

**If a man (tis)** - This is the impersonal pronoun and could be translated "**If anyone...**". James is not singling anyone out specifically, but is concerned with any individual who might profess the kind of **faith** he describes.

**Faith** - In the Greek text this is placed forward for emphasis. James wants them to certain to understand that faith is the issue. So literally it reads somewhat awkward in English "*If faith anyone may speak of having*." Faith is James' focal point, his point of concern. His Greek readers fully understood his emphasis.

As someone has said "Faith is like calories; you can't see them but you can see the results!"

**Lawrence Richards on Paul and James** - James stresses the work of the believer in relation to faith; Paul stresses the work of Christ in relation to faith. James is concerned that the outcome of faith be fruit (2:14) so that no one be able to confuse creed with Christianity; Paul is concerned that the object of faith be Christ, unmixed with self-reliance or self-righteousness. James writes shortly after the resurrection, when the church was Jewish and the Old Testament well known; Paul writes later, when the conversion of gentiles raised questions never asked or thought of earlier. (Teacher's Commentary)

#### RELATED SERMONS AND ARTICLES ON FAITH AND WORKS:

- Gil Rugh - [James 2:14-17: The Role of Faith and Works](#)
- Alexander Maclaren - James 2:14-23: Faith Without Works
- John F. Hart - [James 2:14-26: How To Energize Our Faith: Reconsidering The Meaning Of James 2:14-26](#)
- John Piper - [James 2:14-16: Does James Contradict Paul?](#)
- Robert V Rakestraw - [James 2:14-26: Does James Contradict the Pauline Soteriology](#)
- Dave Roper - [James 2:14-26: A Faith That Works](#)
- John MacArthur - [James 2:14-20: Dead Faith](#)
- Steven Cole - [James 2:14-19 Saving Faith: Genuine or False?](#)
- Rich Cathers - [James 2:14-26 - Sermon with illustrations](#)
- E P Barrows - [James 2 - The Alleged Disagreement Between Paul and James](#)

It is easy to hold your hand up in an evangelistic service and say "I believe in Jesus", but James is challenging this profession to be validated by appropriate behavior, obedience, a changed life, good works.

The apostle John also addressed false or superficial faith in his writings.

For example in **John 2** we read...

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many **believed (pisteuo)** in His name (this would seem to speak of salvation but read on), beholding His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was **not** (ou = absolute negation) **entrusting** (same verb for "believed" - **pisteuo** = imperfect tense = pictures this as occurring over and over) Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man. (John 2:23-25)

**Comment:** Most commentators agree these "believers" in **John 2:23-25** were not saved as shown by a few random commentaries below...

**J. Vernon McGee** - A great many folk read that and say, "My, isn't it wonderful that people were believing on Him." But it wasn't wonderful, friend, because theirs was not saving faith at all. They merely nodded in assent when they saw the miracles that He did. So notice what follows.

**D A Carson** - The people 'believed in his name': the expression is *episteusan eis to onoma autou*, even though their faith is spurious....To exercise faith on the grounds of having witnessed miraculous signs is precarious (John 4:48; cf. Mark 8:11, 12, 13). Although miracles cannot command faith (John 10:32), it is better to believe on the ground of miracles than not at all (cf. John 10:38). Sadly, their faith was spurious, and Jesus knew it. Unlike other religious leaders, he cannot be duped by flattery, enticed by praise or caught off-guard in innocence. His knowledge of men's hearts is profound, and accounts in part for the diversity of his approaches to individuals in the Gospels. He therefore did not entrust himself to these spurious converts. (The Greek repeats the verb, but with a slightly different meaning: we might paraphrase, 'the people trusted in his

name, but he did not entrust himself to them.')

 (Carson, D. A. The Gospel According to John. W. B. Eerdmans)

**KJV Bible Commentary** - Jesus remained in Jerusalem for the Passover, and many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles. The word used to express belief (Greek *pisteuo*) is used in the next verse. But Jesus did not commit himself. Christ did not entrust Himself to them because they were not true believers. He concluded this because he knew all men. These were nominal believers whose only interest was the miracles. He did not need their testimony for he knew what was in man. These people had not accepted Him with saving faith, but rather they accepted Him as a powerful miracle worker. ([Dobson, E G, Charles Feinberg, E Hindson, Woodrow Kroll, H L. Wilmington: KJV Bible Commentary: Nelson](#))

**Clarke's Commentary** - They **believed** him to be the promised Messiah, but did not **believe** in him to the salvation of their souls: for we find, from the following verse, that their hearts were not at all changed, because our blessed Lord could not trust himself to them.

**Warren Wiersbe** - The words believed in **John 2:23** and commit in **John 2:24** are the same Greek word. These people believed in Jesus, but He did not believe in them! They were "unsaved believers"! It was one thing to respond to a miracle but quite something else to commit oneself to Jesus Christ and continue in His Word (John 8:30, 31). John was not discrediting the importance of our Lord's signs, because he wrote his book to record these signs and to encourage his readers to trust Jesus Christ and receive eternal life (John 20:30, 31). However, throughout the book, John makes it clear that it takes more than believing in miracles for a person to be saved. Seeing the signs and believing in them would be a great beginning; in fact, even the disciples started that way and had to grow in their faith (compare John 2:11 and v. 22). ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

In **John 3** the apostle links genuine saving faith with obedience (actually lack thereof) that...

He who **believes** (present tense = as the habit of their life) in the Son has eternal life; but he who **does not** (ou = absolute negation) **obey** (present tense = as discerned by the general direction of their life) the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (**John 3:36**)

In **John 8** we see another example of superficial faith John recording that...

As He spoke these things (eg, He warned them "*I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins.*"), many came to believe in Him.

Then **Jesus** proceeds to describe the evidence called for to show that one's belief is not just intellectual but has resulted in a genuine changed heart...

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who **had believed** Him (Notice that He did not question that they had expressed a belief in Him), "If you **abide** (present tense = as the habit of their life) in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine..." (**John 8:31**)

So **Jesus** like **James** specifies "abiding" in His Word (which will determine what one believes and consequently how one behaves) is the proof that their belief was genuine, saving belief. So if belief determines behavior, it behooves us as good Bereans to examine the behavior of these "believing" Jews for fruit that either substantiates or refutes the authenticity of the root (true, saving faith). In fact what we discover is rotten fruit according to our Lord (remember He knew all men from John 2:23-25) who declared...

I know that you are Abraham's offspring (physically the Jews came from Abraham's lineage); yet (stark contrast) you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you (cp with John 8:31 where He had just stated "if you abide in My word..."). (John 8:37)

It is quite instructive to read **John 8:30-59** and observe the final act of "belief", John recording that...

they (the same audience who had "believed" in Him!) picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple. (John 8:59)

**Below are a number of commentaries on John 8:30-59 that address the issue of genuine belief.**

**J Vernon McGee** - Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone. It will produce something. After a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he will want to "continue in His Word." The proof of faith is continuing with the Savior. As the pastor of a church, I learned to watch out for the person who is active in the church but is not interested in the study of the Word of God. Such a one is dangerous to a church. ([McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Barton** - As the following verses (John 8:30-59) demonstrate, some of these new believers did not remain his



followers for long. ([Barton, B. et al: The NIV Life Application Commentary Series: Tyndale](#))

**Borchert** - As Jesus was not convinced by the believing of the Jews in Jas 2:23, 24, 25, he was not misled by the believing noted in 8:30. Instead, he called forth from those who believed the quality of consistency epitomized in the Johannine term "abide," "continue," or "remain" (menein, "hold to"). The believer who is committed to abide in Jesus and his word is in this Gospel to be designated as an authentic (alēthēs) disciple (cf. John 6:64, 65, 66; contrast Jn 5:38). (Borchert, G. L. Vol. 25A: John 1-11 The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers)

**Dr Charles Ryrie** comments that the belief of the Jews (John 8:30) was "Likely only a profession because of what they said in verse 33 (Ed: Not to mention what they sought to do in Jn 8:59!). ([The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Translation: 1995. Moody Publishers](#))

**NIV Study Bible** comments that the belief of these Jews "Here seems to be imperfect and transitory. Their words show that these people were not true believers (see John 8:33, 37).

In the **Bible Knowledge Commentary Edwin Blum** commenting on **John 8:31-32** says that "It was possible to "believe" in the message of repentance and the coming kingdom without being born again. Continuing in the truth is the sign of true followers and learners (disciples). If they really grasped His message, they would find salvation truth. Knowing this salvation truth would liberate them from their bondage in sin. ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#))

In summary, just from the isolated passages in John, we can see that Jesus taught the same truth vital relationship between faith and works which James is teaching in this section.

**Says** - Some translate this with the nuance "claims" (NET Bible, NIV) or "professes" (Weymouth). Note that since **faith** is invisible, this person's possession of faith is dependent upon his verbal testimony alone.

**Wuest** has an interesting rendering - What profit is there, my brethren, if a person is saying, I am in possession of faith, and he is not in possession of works?

**Has (echo)** is in the present tense indicating that this man's life is marked by the continuing absence of "deeds". Here is where we need to be careful not to twist what James is saying (or not saying). He is not saying that one must add deeds to his faith in order to be saved but rather that the deeds spring out of a saved person's life.

**Alexander Maclaren** bluntly comments that "The people who least live their creeds are not seldom the people who shout the loudest about them. The paralysis which affects the arms does not, in these cases, interfere with the tongue. (James 2:14-23: Faith Without Works)

**Faith (4102) (pistis)** is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it.

**Swindoll** observes that...

**James** used the word "**faith**" in two senses. In one sense it meant that kind of mental assent that even the demons possess (James 2:19). Such **faith** or belief, he said, is not sufficient to save. It must be a **faith** instead that is living and gives evidence of life in **works**. "**Works**" to him were the outworking of **saving faith**.

On the other hand, by "**faith**" Paul meant a genuine belief that issues in action. He spoke of a faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6). When he opposed "**works**" and "**faith**," he meant works of a legal nature by which people supposed that they could gain merit before God. Thus, when we consider the meaning of these words in their contexts, both Paul and James believed the same thing. Each was emphasizing a certain facet of the truth. Paul believed that individuals are saved only by faith, a faith that is alive and working. James also believed that people are saved by faith, a faith that is more than mental assent, one that works. (Swindoll, C. R., & Zuck, R. B.. Understanding Christian theology. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers) (**Bolding added**)

**Maclaren** writes that

**Faith** is the hand that grasps. It is the means of communication, it is the channel through which the grace which is the life, or, rather, I should say, the life which is the grace, comes to us. It is the open door by which the angel of God comes in with his gifts. It is like the petals of the flowers, opening when the sunshine kisses

them, and, by opening, laying bare the depths of their calyxes to be illuminated and coloured, and made to grow by the sunshine which itself has opened them, and without the presence of which, within the cup, there would have been neither life nor beauty. So faith is the basis of everything; the first shoot from which all the others ascend...**Faith works**. It is the foundation of all true work; even in the lowest sense of the word we might almost say that. But in the Christian scheme it is eminently the underlying requisite for all work which God does not consider as busy idleness...

**Your work of faith.** There is the whole of the thorny subject of the relation of faith and works packed into a nutshell. It is exactly what James said and it is exactly what a better than James said. When the Jews came to Him with their externalism, and thought that God was to be pleased by a whole rabble of separate good actions, and so said, 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?' Jesus said, 'Never mind about Works. This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent,' and out of that will come all the rest. That is the mother tincture; everything will flow from that. So Paul says, 'Your work of faith.'

Does your faith work? Perhaps I should ask other people rather than you. Do men see that your faith works; that its output is different from the output of men who are not possessors of a 'like precious faith'? Ask yourselves the question, and God help you to answer it. (Read full sermon on 1 Thessalonians 1:3)

**Able** ([1410](#)) (**dunamai**) conveys the basic meaning of that which has the inherent ability to do something or accomplish some end. Thus **dunamai** means to be able to, to be capable of, to be strong enough to do or to have power to do something. The derivative word **dunamis** (from **dunamai**) refers to intrinsic power or inherent ability, the power or ability to carry out some function, the potential for functioning in some way, the power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature.

As stated the Greek expects a negative reply - That faith does not have the inherent ability to bring about salvation!**Hiebert** notes that "The negative *me* ([3361](#)) at the head of the question implies that the answer must be a resounding no."

**Save** ([4982](#))(**sozo**) has the basic meaning of rescuing one from great peril. Additional nuances include to protect, keep alive, preserve life, deliver, heal, be made whole. The Philippian jailer summed up spiritual salvation asking Paul and Silas

"Sirs, what must I do to be **saved**?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be **saved**, you and your household." (Acts 16:31-note).

And so James introduces his analysis of **genuine** versus **non-genuine faith** with a rhetorical (rhetoric = the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing) question (a statement that resembles a question but does not require a response) -

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

The Greek construction is such that it demands a negative answer and thus the second question could be paraphrased...

That faith cannot save him, can it?

**John Blanchard** put it well when he said that "The evidence of saving faith is not how much you believe but how well you behave."

**R. B. Kuiper** - Nowhere does the Bible tell us that salvation is by a faith that does not work.

As an aside notice that the **KJV** (and NKJV) has a potentially misleading translation of the last phrase rendering it **Can faith save him?**" (KJV ignores the definite article in the Greek). That is not what James asked. He is not questioning whether we are saved by faith! He is raising the question concerning the quality of that faith.

James does not open this section by saying that faith alone does not save but addresses the quality of the faith that results in salvation.

**Billy Graham** echoed James' concern when he said "Faith that saves has one distinguishing quality; saving faith is a faith that produces obedience, it is a faith that brings about a way of life."

**J I Packer** - What saves is faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.

**Says he has faith** - In essence this man **professes** to have **faith** (where profess is used in the sense of declaring in word only). As we often say today "He made a profession of faith." But the question arises as to how do we know his **profession** of faith represents genuine faith or faith that has wrought a new birth? At the risk of being redundant, that is the question that James seeks to address.

**Hiebert** notes that "The aorist infinitive of *sozo* (translated "to save") primarily looks to the future culmination of the believer's salvation. The reference is to acquittal in the coming Judgment Day. "The criterion then will not be profession but performance." ([Commentary on James](#))



**Zodhiates** - This verse is a pronouncement of the practicality of the Christian faith. Christianity is not getting a few notions into our heads, but it is a change of the seat of all our affections and dispositions, a change of the heart. True, we begin with the head, but we travel to the heart, and from the heart we travel to the hand. (The Labor of Love)

**J Vernon McGee** - James is not talking about the works of the Law. He simply says that the faith which saves you will produce works, works of faith. The faith that James is talking about here is professing faith, that which is phony and counterfeit. Paul refers to the same idea when he says in 1Corinthians 15:2, "...unless ye have believed in vain." Paul also wrote, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith..." (2Co 13:5). One of the greatest dangers for us preachers of the gospel is that we like to see people converted, and we are willing to accept a brazen and flippant yes from some individual who says, "Yes, I'll trust Jesus." However, it might be just an impertinent, impudent, and insolent nod of the head; it is so easy today to be as phony as a three-dollar bill. (Listen to Dr McGee's Mp3's on [James 2:14](#) ; [James 2:14 - continued](#))

After James' introductory question he immediately illustrates his point in a way that all can comprehend, stating in the next two verses that talk is fine, but it's just talk unless it is backed up by appropriate deeds. In the context of faith, the idea is that one can **profess** faith, but this **profession** is shown to be a true **possession** (saving faith) by one's good deeds. James does not say the good deeds save a person but his implication even in this introduction is that these deeds demonstrate the authenticity of one's profession.

As you ponder James' sobering analysis of **saving** versus **non-saving** faith, remember that God is not a God of confusion (1Cor 14:33). Remember also that God does not contradict Himself, so that although some of this section at first appears contradictory to other NT teaching (especially by Paul), this seeming contradiction reflects our failure to understand, not God's failure to be orderly and non-contradictory! The Bible is a unified whole and it behooves us to seek to understand all that Scripture teaches on a specific **doctrine** such as **salvation** lest we misinterpret passages that seem less clear (this is the goal of "systematic theology"). A good rule of thumb in interpreting Scripture is always to seek to understand the more difficult or "obtuse" passages in the light of the more obvious and easily understood teachings.

Remembering that James is speaking primarily to first century Jews who had come out of Judaism, it is not surprising that James would see to clarify the role of works in one's salvation. Before these Jews had been become believers in the Messiah, they had emphasized the importance of good deeds. Now in the New Covenant which is entered by grace, they might have been a tendency to assume that works were not part of this new relationship to God.

As **Steven Cole** wisely reminds us regarding the apparent contradiction of the teaching of Paul and James...

we must seek to understand the particular problem that each author was addressing. Paul wrote Galatians to deal with the error of adding some outward work, such as circumcision, to faith alone for salvation. James wrote this text to confront the problem of those who profess to believe in Christ, but do not have any fruit to show for it. If we lose sight of this, we will err.

C. E. B. Cranfield (cited by John MacArthur, Faith Works [Word], p. 148) correctly observes, "The burden of this section is not (as is often supposed) that we are saved through faith plus works, but that we are saved through genuine, as opposed to counterfeit, faith." Satan is the master deceiver. Since salvation is through faith, it is not surprising that he works overtime to lead people astray on the matter of saving faith. If Satan can get someone to think that he will get into heaven because of his many good deeds, apart from faith in Christ, he is perfectly content to watch that person devote his entire life to good deeds. Or, if a person who was born and raised in the church thinks, "I'm going to heaven because I believe in Jesus as my Savior"—but, his faith is merely intellectual and it doesn't affect his daily life—Satan is happy with such false "faith." ([Saving Faith: Genuine or False?](#))

**Alexander Ross** commenting on the apparent conflict between James and Paul writes that...

They are not antagonists facing each other with crossed swords; they stand back to back, confronting different foes of the Gospel. (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)

**Paul** addresses the false teaching that insisted works must be added to faith in order for one to be justified (declared righteous), whereas James is insisting on the need for good works in the one who has been justified by faith. Paul taught that no one can be justified by his efforts but only by faith...

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God **not as a result of works**, (why?) that no one should boast. (see notes Ephesians 2:8; 2:9)

James taught that one who professes to be a new creation (cp Jas 1:18) must demonstrate his or her new life by their good (God) works. And when one compares the next verse in Ephesians 2, it is clear that Paul completely agreed with James...

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (see note Ephesians 2:10)

Paul was not opposed to good works but spoke specifically against the idea that faith was insufficient for salvation. As John MacArthur correctly concludes...

Both James and Paul view good works as the proof of faith—not the path to salvation. (see Earl Radmacher - [Faith According To The Apostle James - Journal of Evangelical Theological Society Volume 33:1 - Mar 1990](#))

**Hiebert** offers a summary of James based upon the centrality of faith...

Faith Tested by Its Response to the Word of God (James 1:19-27)

Faith Tested by Its Reaction to Partiality (James 2:1-13)

Faith Tested by Its Production of Works (James 2:14-26)

Faith Tested by Its Production of Self-Control (James 3:1-18)

Faith Tested by Its Reactions to Worldliness (James 4:1-5:12)

Faith Tested by Its Resort to Prayer (James 5:13-18)

This survey of James suggests that the key which is found hanging at the front door (James 1:3) is indeed the proper key to unlock the structure of the epistle. The use of the key, tests of a living faith, has readily unlocked the door and given ready access to its various chambers. Not only does it give ready access to all parts of the house but it also brings into conscious display the fact of the underlying unity of the whole. Its use gives unity and coherence to the entire epistle. It displays the full harmony of this epistle with the rest of the New Testament. James, like Paul, fully believed in "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6).

This understanding of the Epistle of James heightens its practical and timely message. The author's stern insistence on Christian practice consistent with Christian profession, his open contempt for all sham, and his stinging rebukes of worldliness in its varied forms are notes that are urgently needed in Christendom today. As long as there are professed Christians who are prone to separate profession and practice, the message of this epistle will continue to be relevant. (Hiebert - [The Unifying Theme of the Epistle of James Bibliotheca Sacra 135:539 Jul 1978](#))

## SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR INTERPRETATIONS OF JAMES 2:14-20

What are the major interpretations of James 2:14-20?

- 1) FAITH + WORKS:** James is advocating that works must be added to faith for faith to be efficacious in saving a sinner, a view held by one of the largest denominations in the world. This is the very error Paul argued vehemently against in both Romans and Galatians where he dealt particularly with the "works of the law".
- 2) FAITH VERSUS WORKS:** James is contradicting Paul's teaching that salvation is by faith alone apart from works. We can discard this possibility immediately because the Word of God never contradicts itself.
- 3) FAITH THAT WORKS:** James is not arguing that faith alone saves but that the faith which is genuine and which truly saves is not alone but is intimately connected to works. This website strongly favors this third interpretation as explained in the following notes.

## WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS?

Paul writes that believers saved by grace through faith are now God's...

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works** (deeds), which God prepared beforehand (when?), that we should walk in them. (see note Ephesians 2:10)

Beloved, as we seek to walk in and bring forth those good deeds which were **prepared beforehand**, we must be careful to notice that the phrase **good deeds** differs from **your deeds**. Remove one letter from *good* and we have the desired result -- *God Deeds!*

One of the primary sources for instruction on **good deeds** is the Pauline epistles. In Paul's writings we observe that he is calling for **good (agathos = good in its character or constitution, beneficial in its effect) deeds**, and the only "**good**" **deeds** are those borne by believers (like "branches") who are abiding in Christ ("the Vine"). **Good deeds** reflect Christ's life in us and flowing through us, these deeds being initiated and energized by His Spirit and bringing glory to His Father (see note Matthew 5:16). Paul reminds us of this necessary supernatural dynamic in Philippians writing that

it is God Who is at **work** in you, both to will and to **work** for His good pleasure. (see **note** Philippians 2:13)

Our **Lord Jesus** stated the same basic principle of **good deeds** when He declared

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for **apart from Me you can do nothing** (absolutely, totally nothing!)...By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit (good deeds = good fruit) and so prove to be My disciples...You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain...." ([John 15:5,8,16](#))

**Paul** reminded the Corinthian church of the parallel supernatural principle regarding **good deeds** explaining that

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that (why does God do it?) always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for **every good deed** ([2Cor 9:8](#)).

**Paul** acknowledged that the key to his **good deeds** was the grace of God writing that His

grace toward me did not prove vain; but I **labored** even more than all of them, **yet not I, but the grace of God with me.** ([1Cor 15:10](#)). (**Comment:** Notice that although Paul labored, his power to do so was provided by the indwelling, enabling grace of God. Once again as so often in Scripture we see the juxtaposition of man's responsibility and God's sovereign provision. Amazing Grace indeed!)

One day in the future the **Lord Jesus** will even

disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. ([1Cor 4:5](#))

In sum, the good deeds that James is calling for to validate one's faith as genuine are deeds which are Spirit initiated and empowered and which bring glory to God our Father. No matter how hostile the society around us may be, we are to be good to the people in it whose lives intersect with ours. Paul reminded the Galatian believers that "While we have opportunity, [we are to] **do good (agathos)** to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10). Believers are to be known for what might be described as **consistent aggressive goodness**, done not simply out of a sense of obligation or duty but motivated by an unselfish love for our Lord and for other people,

for (we) have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for (us), leaving (us) an example...to follow in His steps.. (see **notes** 1 Peter 2:21)

**See also the related discussion of Good Deeds** . (see sermon by Spurgeon on **Good Works**

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**Faith At Work** - Christians sometimes sing the following words:

**This world is not my home,  
I'm just a-passing through.**

Does that mean that we who are headed for heaven aren't to have a concern for the present world? No. We can't pray as Jesus instructed us, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10), and be indifferent to the needs and evils of our planet. On the contrary, we ought to be eager to carry out Paul's counsel, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all" (Gal. 6:10).

British historian Paul Johnson points out that our spiritual forebears in 19th-century England battled against slavery, poverty, vice, and illiteracy because of their devotion to God. He wrote, "Generous-minded Victorians, who took big risks by publicly expressing their concern for the poor, did not pretend that they knew everything about the problem or propose specific solutions." The dynamic of their concern, Johnson asserts, was their solid belief in God.

We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but our faith is to produce "good works" (Ep 2:10). Let's follow the example of those Victorian Christians. And may we be like Christ, "who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). — Vernon C. Grounds ([Our Daily Bread](#), [Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

So let our lips and lives express  
The holy gospel we profess;  
So let our works and virtues shine,

To prove the doctrine all divine. --Watts

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**A living faith is a working faith.**

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**A Heart For The Homeless** - Members of the First Presbyterian Church in Snohomish, Washington, had a large supply of leftovers from the celebration of their 125th anniversary. They decided to give the food to the women and children in a nearby homeless shelter. As a chilling rain poured down outside, volunteers unloaded containers, one of which included a large cake. Someone remarked, "I hope today is somebody's birthday." A homeless woman replied, "Every day inside is a holiday."

Jesus knew the experience of homelessness. He said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). Yet no one had more compassion for the poor.

James emphasized the need for believers to help each other materially. He wrote, "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?" (Jas 2:15, 16).

We must help the spiritually destitute find a heavenly home by sharing the gospel with them, but we must never neglect those who are poor in this world's goods. A heart for God will also be a heart for the homeless. — Vernon C. Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

More like the Master I would live and grow,  
More of His love to others I would show;  
More self-denial, like His in Galilee,  
More like the Master I long to ever be. —Gabriel

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**Compassion is love in action.**

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**A Loan To The Lord** - A father gave his little boy 50 cents and told him he could use it any way he wanted. Later when Dad asked about it, the boy told him that he had lent it to someone.

"Who did you lend it to?" he asked. The boy answered, "I gave it to a poor man on the street because he looked hungry."

"Oh, that was foolish. You'll never get it back," replied the father. "But Daddy, the Bible says that people who give to the poor lend to the Lord."

The father was so pleased with the son's reply that he gave the boy another 50 cents. "See," said the son. "I told you I would get it back—only I didn't think it would be so soon!"

Has the Lord ever asked you for a loan? Have you ever recognized in the needs of others a direct request from heaven for some of what you have? The Bible warns against the sin of passing by the needy with pious words while keeping a tight grip on our wallets (James 2:14, 15, 16, 17). And Galatians 6:10 says that we are to "do good to all."

We aren't promised that we'll get rewarded immediately. But in Jesus' teaching to His followers about His return, He says we will be rewarded for giving of ourselves to others in His name (Matthew 25:34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46). — Henry G. Bosch ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Give as you would to the Master  
If you met His searching look;  
Give as you would of your substance  
If His hand your offering took! —Anon.

**You may give without loving  
but you can't love without giving.**

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**James 2:14** - The well-known apparent "conflict" between James and Paul focuses especially on this verse. The Apostle Paul says emphatically: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Yet James, also an apostle, insists: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20) There is no real conflict, of course. In our text verse, there is a definite article before the word "faith." That is, James' question is, literally, "Can that faith save him?" This is obviously intended as a rhetorical question, with a negative answer. In the context, James is saying that a "profession of faith" is not enough to produce salvation, if that faith "have not works." Since that

kind of faith does not save, then what kind of faith does save? The answer is given by Paul, in the very verses quoted above. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that—i.e., that faith (which is the inference in the original)—is not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." In other words, true saving faith is not a man-generated faith of some kind; it is a supernatural gift of God!" And that faith does save, because it is part of the new nature implanted by the Holy Spirit when a new believer is born again. Furthermore, this faith does inevitably produce good works, for the verse following says that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Faith must be faith in something, of course, and true saving faith must have its proper object. It must be centered in the saving gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in His inerrant Word. Such faith will inevitably result in a changed life and good works, as well as a sound and growing confidence in the deity of Christ, His substitutionary death and bodily resurrection, the full authority of Scripture and the assurance of one's personal salvation. That is the faith that saves. - HMM

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**Salvation Army** - William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was brushing his mane-like white hair when his son Bramwell stepped into the room. "Bramwell!" he cried. "Did you know that men sleep out all night on the bridges?" "Well, yes," the son replied. "A lot of poor fellows I suppose do that." "Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself to have known it and to have done nothing for them!" his father retorted. And when the son began to talk about the Poor Law program, General Booth waved a hand and said, "Go and do something! We must do something!" "What can we do?" "Get them a shelter!" "That will cost money," replied Bramwell. "Well, that is your affair. Something must be done. Get hold of a warehouse and warm it, and find something to cover them. But mind, Bramwell, no coddling!" That was the beginning of Salvation Army shelters. (The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers, W. Wiersbe, p. 184) ([Bible.org](http://Bible.org))

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**True Faith = True Godliness - C H Spurgeon** - You will never find true faith unattended by true godliness; nor will you ever discover a truly holy life which does not have at its root a living faith based upon the righteousness of Christ. Woe to those who seek one without the other! There are some who cultivate faith and forget holiness. These may be very high in orthodoxy, but they shall be very deep in condemnation, for they hold the truth in unrighteousness. There are others who have strained after holiness of life, but have denied the faith, like the Pharisees whom the Master said were 'whitewashed sepulchers.' We must have faith, for this is the foundation; we must have holiness of life, for this is the superstructure. We need the superstructure of spiritual life if we would have comfort in the day of doubt. But do not seek a holy life without faith, for that would be to erect a house which can afford no permanent shelter, because it is not founded on a rock. ([Bible.org](http://Bible.org))

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**Martin Luther** on the vital (crucial) relationship between Root and Fruit (cp Faith and Works) - Insist on it—inwardly, in the spirit, before God, man is justified by faith alone, without works; but outwardly and publicly, before the people and himself, he is justified through his works. That is, he thereby becomes known and certain himself that he honestly believes. Call the one a public justification, the other an inward justification, in this sense that the public justification is a fruit, a result, a proof of the justification in the heart. Accordingly, man is not justified by it before God, but must previously be justified before Him. In the same way, the fruits of the tree proclaim the obvious goodness of the tree, which follows and proves its inner, natural goodness. This is what James means in his epistle when he says: "Faith without works is dead." The fact that works do not follow is a certain sign that there is not faith, but only a dead thought and dream, which people falsely call faith. ([Bible.org](http://Bible.org))

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**A Time For Action** - The woman chuckled as she told me about the time she woke her husband to tell him she was in labor and needed to go to the hospital. He jumped out of bed, dropped to his knees, and said, "Honey, let's pray." She told him that it was not the time to kneel and pray. It was time to get dressed and head for the hospital. It was time for action!

I think this was the type of message God gave Moses when He said of the Israelites, "Why do you cry to Me?" (Exodus 14:15). Not long before that, Pharaoh had permitted the Israelites to leave Egypt, but then he changed his mind (Ex 14:5, 6). Wanting to bring them back, he and his army chased after them (Ex 14:7, 8, 9). The Israelites were terrified when they saw the Egyptians approaching. They were trapped at the shore of the Red Sea, with nowhere to go! But Moses assured Israel that God would deliver them. Now was a time for action—not crying to Him. It was time to "go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Ex 14:16).

There's a proper time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1), including a time to pray and a time to act. When we see someone who lacks food and clothes, it's right to provide what they need (James 2:15, 16). Sometimes we need to trust God and take immediate action. — Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](http://OurDailyBread.org))

Lord, when I sense Your call to serve,  
Help me to follow through;  
I must not just stand by and pray  
When there is work to do. —Fasick

If God has already told you what to do,  
you don't need to ask Him again.

## RELATED RESOURCES ON FAITH

- [Miscellanies on Faith-- Jonathan Edwards](#)
- [The Spirit Working Faith -- A. W. Pink](#)
- [True Faith -- A. W. Pink](#)
- [Fact! Faith! Feeling! - F B Meyer](#)
- [The Nature of Faith -- Thomas Watson \(Interesting\)](#)
- [A Godly Man's Faith -- Thomas Watson](#)
- [Three Men in Fetters -- Jim Ehrhard from Pilgrim's Progress](#)
- [Faith's Way of Approach -- Charles Spurgeon](#)
- [Genesis 17:1,2 - Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [Job 13:15 Faith Tried and Triumphant - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [Job 23:6 The Question of Fear and the Answer of Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
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- [Mark 1:15 Faith and Repentance Inseparable - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [Mark 4:40 Why Is Faith So Feeble? - C H Spurgeon](#)
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- [Ephesians 2:8 Faith: What Is It? How Can It Be Obtained?- C H Spurgeon](#)
- [Ephesians 6:16 The Shield of Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [Colossians 2:6 Life and Walk of Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [2 Timothy 1:12 Faith Illustrated - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [2 Thessalonians 1:3 A Lecture for Little Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [2 Thessalonians 1:3 The Necessity of Growing Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [Hebrews 11:6 Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [Hebrews 11:6 Faith Essential to Pleasing God - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [Hebrews 11:8 The Obedience of Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [James 2:17 Fruitless Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [1 Peter 2:6 Faith's Sure Foundation - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [2 Peter 1:1-4 Faith and Life - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [1 John 5:1 Faith and Life - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [1 John 5:4,5 Victorious Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [1 John 5:4 The Victory of Faith - C H Spurgeon](#)
- [1 John 5:9,10 Faith and the Witness Upon Which it is Founded - C H Spurgeon](#)
- Obedience of faith. See also study on pistos



- Believe ([4100](#)) pisteuo
- Believe, not ([569](#)) apisteo
- Unbelief ([570](#)) apistia
- Unbelieving ([571](#)) apistos
- Faith ([4102](#)) pistis [Click](#) for a links to all 243 uses of pistis in the NAS, which is translated as faith, 238; faithfulness, 3; pledge, 1; proof, 1.
- The faith - Study of the meaning of this phrase

**Note:** This preceding list includes most but not all of Spurgeon's sermons in which the word "faith" is in the sermon title.

**James 2:15** **If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, (NASB: Lockman)**

**Greek:** [ean adelphos e adelphe gumnoi huparchosin](#) (3PPAS) [kai leipomenoi](#) (PPMPN) [tes ephemerou trophes.](#)

**Amplified:** If a brother or sister is poorly clad and lacks food for each day, [Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

**NLT:** Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing [NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** If a fellow man or woman has no clothes to wear and nothing to eat, [Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** If a brother or a sister have been poorly dressed for a long time and are lacking in daily food

**Young's Literal:** and if a brother or sister may be naked, and may be destitute of the daily food,

**IF A BROTHER OR SISTER IS WITHOUT CLOTHING AND IN NEED OF DAILY FOOD: ean adelphos e adelphe gumnoi huparchosin (3PPAS) kai leipomenoi (PPMPN) tes ephemerou trophes:**

- Jas 2:5; Job 31:16-21; Isaiah 58:7,10; Ezekiel 18:7; Matthew 25:35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40; Mark 14:7; Luke 3:11; Acts 9:29; Hebrews 11:37
- [James 2 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries (includes multiple journal articles on faith)
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**Good deeds** (see study of good deeds) are not the **root** of salvation, but they are the **fruit** of genuine salvation (cf Mt 3:8, Ephesians 2:10 [note]).

Although **Martin Luther** found James to be a "right strawy epistle", he made a statements similar to James regarding faith and works noting that...

**Faith** is a living, restless thing. It cannot be inoperative.

The true, **living faith**, which the Holy Spirit instills into the heart, simply cannot be idle.

The lives of true believers should demonstrate the reality of their spiritual regeneration and supernatural transformation received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Believers who have been **redeemed...from every lawless deed** and now are the rightful possessions of Christ, are to be **zealous** (afire, ardent, fervent, eager, enthusiastic) **for good deeds**. (Titus 2:14-note)

**Brother or sister** - Implies they are of the household of faith or fellow believers which is in accord with other uses in the NT, for example in 1 Corinthians...

Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. (1Cor 7:15)

**Brother** ([80](#))(**adelphos** from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) means brother or near kinsman. "Adelphós generally denotes

a fellowship of life based on identity of origin, e.g., members of the same family (Mt. 1:2; Lk 3:1, 19; 6:14); members of the same tribe, countrymen, and so forth (Acts 3:22; 7:23; Ro 9:3)." (Zodhiates) Figuratively, adelphos describes members of the Christian community, spiritual brother, fellow Christian, fellow believer (Ro 8:29). Jews used adelphos to describe fellow countrymen (Acts 3:22).

So regardless of their sex, if they are in need, they should be assisted, for there is no inequality with God.

This calls to mind Paul's charge in Galatians...

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (**Gal 6:10**)

**Vincent** has somewhat of a technical note on the verb **'is'** (huparcho) writing that "The distinction between this word and the simple einai, to be, is very subtle. The verb **huparcho**, originally means to make a beginning; hence, to begin or to come into being; and, though used substantially as a synonym of **einai** (eimi = to be) of a thing actually existing and at hand, it has a backward look to an antecedent condition which has been protracted into the present. Thus we might paraphrase here, *"If a brother or sister, having been in a destitute condition, be found by you in that condition."* **Einai**, on the other hand, would simply state the present fact of destitution. (Vincent, M. R. Word Studies in the New Testament 1:743)

**Hiebert** explains this point as follows "The verb rendered **'is'** (huparcho) seems to add a subtle touch to the picture. The common verb **eimi** ("to be") would simply have stated the present fact; this verb (huparcho), which basically means "to make a beginning," has a backward look; it suggests that the need discovered was a past condition extending into the present.

**Without clothing** (1131) (**gumnos**) literally means naked, unclad, without clothing. In context it probably doesn't mean totally naked but poorly dressed or partially dressed or as the RSV renders it "is ill clad" or as the New English Bible renders it "is in rags".

**In need** (3007) (**leipo**) means to leave behind (transitive) or lack, fall short of (intransitive). Here in James leipo means to be deficient in something that ought to be present. This verb is in the **present tense** signifying that this is not a transient need but an ongoing need.

**Of daily food** - So not only are the poorly clothed but this sad state is compounded by their being poorly fed. The phrase does not speak so much to that which is needed day by day, but to the fact that this person did not have enough food for even a single day. James is barring no verbal holds so to speak to create a picture of extreme destitution, not only cold but also hungry.

**Thomas Watson** (Puritan writer)...

Grace does not lie as a sleepy habit in the soul, but will put forth itself in vigorous and glorious actings. Grace can no more be concealed, than fire. Grace does not lie in the heart as a stone in the earth—but as seed in the earth. It will spring up into good works! "Our people must also learn to devote themselves to good works." Titus 3:14-note

The lamp of faith must be filled with the oil of charity. Faith alone justifies—but justifying faith is never alone. You may as well separate weight from lead, or heat from fire—as works from faith. Good works, though they are not the causes of salvation—yet they are evidences of salvation. Though they are not the foundation—yet they are the superstructure. Faith must not be built upon works—but works must be built upon faith.

"You are married to Christ—that we should bring forth fruit unto God." Romans 7:4-note

Faith is the grace which marries Christ, and good works are the children which faith bears. Works are distinct from faith—as the sap in the vine is different from the clusters of fruit which grow upon it. Works are the touchstone of faith.

"Show me your faith by your works." James 2:18-note

Works honor faith. These fruits adorn the 'trees of righteousness'. This queen—faith, has the handmaids of good works waiting upon her.

Good works are more visible and conspicuous than faith. Faith is a more hidden grace. It may lie hidden in the heart and not be seen—but when works are joined with it, now it shines forth in its native beauty! Though a garden is ever so decked with flowers—yet they are not seen until the light comes. So the heart of a Christian may be enriched with faith—but it is like a flower in the night. It is not seen until works come. When this light shines before men, then faith appears in its orient colors!

James 2:16 and **one** of you **says** to them, "**Go** in **peace**, **be warmed** and **be filled**," and **yet** you do not **give** them **what** is **necessary** for their **body**, **what use** is that? (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: [eipe](#) (3SAAS) [de tis autois](#) ex [humon](#), [hupagete](#) (2PPAM) [en eirene](#), [thermainesthe](#) (2PPMM) [kai chortazesthe](#), (2PPPM) [me dote](#) (2PAAS) [de autois ta epitedeia tou somatos](#), [ti to ophelos?](#)

**Amplified:** And one of you says to him, Good-bye! Keep [yourself] warm and well fed, without giving him the necessities for the body, what good does that do? ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** 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?

**NLT:** and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** and one of you say, "Good luck to you I hope you'll keep warm and find enough to eat", and yet give them nothing to meet their physical needs, what on earth is the good of that? ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** and one of you says to them, Be going away in peace, be warming yourselves and be feeding yourselves to your utter satisfaction, and you do not give them the things needful for the body, what profit is there?

**Young's Literal:** and any one of you may say to them, 'Depart ye in peace, be warmed, and be filled,' and may not give to them the things needful for the body, what is the profit?

AND ONE OF YOU SAYS TO THEM GO IN PEACE, BE WARMED AND BE FILLED AND YET YOU DO NOT GIVE THEM WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR THEIR BODY: [eipe](#) (3SAAS) [de tis autois](#) ex [humon](#), [hupagete](#) (2PPAM) [en eirene](#), [thermainesthe](#) (2PPMM) [kai chortazesthe](#), (2PPPM) [me dote](#) (2PAAS) [de autois ta epitedeia tou somatos](#):

- Jas 2:5; Job 31:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21; Isa 58:7,10; Ezek 18:7; Mt 25:35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40; Mk 14:7; Luke 3:11; Acts 9:29; Heb 11:37
- [James 2 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries (includes multiple journal articles on faith)
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**One of you** - The speaker is not identified and so is applicable to each and every person who reads this letter (even me!).

**Go in peace, be warmed and be filled** - Each of these verbs is in the form of a command calling for continuous action (present imperative). The voice could be either middle or passive. If middle (reflexive) the translation would be something like "you yourself go, warm yourself and fill yourself".

**Be filled** (5526)(**chortazo** from **chortos** = fodder or grass or herbage of the field in general) means to feed with herbs, grass or hay and then to eat one's fill resulting in a state of being satisfied eat one's fill. Chortazo was used of the feeding of animals until they wanted nothing more. They were allowed to eat until they were completely satisfied. The picture is of animals who stayed at the feed trough until they wanted nothing more to eat.

**Kistemaker** favors the middle voice and renders the passage - Let the shivering, hungry brothers or sisters pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

**Phillips** paraphrase picks up this harsh dismissal tone - Good luck to you I hope you'll keep warm and find enough to eat

**Hiebert** notes that "The passive implies, "Let someone else feed and warm you," but indicates that the speaker has no intention of doing that himself...Under either voice the speaker reveals an inactive faith that fails. to meet the needs of needy members of the Christian community

The translation favors the passive voice "**be** warmed...**be** filled." But even so with the present tense there is a tone of dismissing their need.

**Yet** - Marks a striking contrast between their profession and their intention.

**Yet you do not give them what is necessary** - In other words, it is not that this person does not have the means to provide for the need. As someone has written this self-satisfied "armchair philanthropist" has no intention of personally supplying their need.

#### WHAT USE IS THAT?: ti to ophelos?:

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**Use (3786)** (**ophelos** from **ophello** = to heap up, to increase, to accumulate or benefit) means an advantage or some benefit derived.

**What use is that?** - Another rhetorical question. Clearly the answer to this illustration is that the words are useless when unaccompanied by appropriate actions as dictated by the dire straits of the "brother or sister". And so James' rhetorical conclusion to his hypothetical picture indicates what he thinks of such "**faith**" (identified by the pronoun "**that**").

**Motyer** - C. H. Spurgeon is credited with the view that 'If you want to give a hungry man a tract, wrap it up in a sandwich'. With great respect, he might better have said, 'If you want to give a hungry man a sandwich, wrap it up in a tract.' For the eye of faith sees forward into the endless reaches of eternity, and is aware that the need to be right with God far outstrips the need for earthly amelioration. Plainly our giving must have 'the cause of the gospel' in this narrower sense well to the fore. But we are rarely caught by this dichotomy; the limitations on our giving are those imposed by our own cramped affections and concerns. (Motyer, J. A. The Message of James: The tests of Faith. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press)

**Zodhiates** rightly observes that "It is the imperfections of this world which provide a great opportunity to test the genuineness of our faith. (The Labor of Love)

#### James 2:17 [Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.](#) (NASB: Lockman)

**Greek:** [houtos kai e pistis, ean me eche](#) (3SPAS) [erga, nekra estin](#) (3SPAI) [kath' heauten.](#)

**Amplified:** So also faith, if it does not have works (deeds and actions of obedience to back it up), by itself is destitute of power (inoperative, dead). ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

**NLT:** So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Yet that is exactly what a bare faith without a corresponding life is like - useless and dead. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Thus also, the aforementioned faith, if it does not keep on having works, is dead in its very constituent elements.

**Young's Literal:** so also the faith, if it may not have works, is dead by itself.

#### EVEN SO FAITH IF IT HAS NO WORKS IS DEAD BEING BY ITSELF: houtos kai e pistis, ean me eche (3SPAS) erga, nekra estin (3SPAI) kath' heauten:

- Jas 2:14,19,20,26; 1 Cor 13:3,13; 1 Th 1:3; 1 Ti 1:5; 2 Pe 1:5, 6, 7, 8, 9
- [James 2 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries (includes multiple journal articles on faith)
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So [\(3779\)](#) (**houtos**) refers to that which precedes and in this case draws an analogy between the previous illustration and the faith which is dead and does not bring salvation.

James is saying, **in the same manner** as a profession to help someone is useless (as illustrated in James 2:15-16) if it is unaccompanied by actions, so too is the profession of one who says "I believe in Jesus" and yet fails to demonstrate the genuineness with appropriate behavior including good deeds.

**Wayne Grudem** has these words of wisdom that relate to a **faith** that **"works"**...

But while the condition of beginning the covenant of grace is always faith in Christ's work alone, the condition of continuing in that covenant is said to be obedience to God's commands. Though this obedience did not in the Old Testament and does not in the New Testament earn us any merit with God, nonetheless, if our **faith** in Christ is **genuine**, it will produce **obedience** (see James 2:17), and obedience to Christ is in the New Testament seen as **necessary evidence** that we are **truly believers** and **members of the new covenant** (see 1John 2:4, 4, 6). ([Grudem, W: Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. IVP; Zondervan, 1994](#)) (Bolding added)

**If it has no works** - This more literally reads "not may be having works."

**James Adamson** explains that "having form, this faith lacks force — outwardly inoperative, because inwardly dead". (The Epistle of James)

**By itself** - James is saying that in its very essence this faith is inwardly dead. The contrast is not between just faith and works but between a dead faith and a living faith.

In his opening statement, James had asked a question that **assumed a negative answer** to the query of whether faith that has no works is faith that is able to save a soul. In other words in his rhetorical question, James implied that faith without works is non-saving faith. In the present passage James states this conclusion more emphatically, using his easy to understand illustration to help his reader comprehend his conclusion.

Do not confuse what James is saying - He is **not** saying one must add **works** to their **faith** in order to be saved. He is saying that **good works** will be the natural (supernatural), irrevocable outcome of **genuine faith**. Don't place the **cart** before the **horse** as you read this passage. The **"horse"** is genuine faith, and the **"cart"** is good works coupled to and flowing out of vibrant, dynamic faith. To carry this horse/cart analogy (being aware that all analogies of spiritual truth are limited) further, if the horse is just a wooden horse and not a real horse, the **cart** cannot make the **horse** move no matter how many "good works" are piled into the cart. Perhaps this is not the best picture, but it does convey the point that we must have an alive, useful "horse" (alive, not dead faith) in order for the cart to move (for good works to be produced).

We need to remember that James is not saying that one is saved by good works but that good works are an natural and expected outflow of genuine faith producing true salvation. Here is one Bible Church's statement of belief that nicely expresses this vitally important distinction...

Good works follow redemption as an evidence of justification, never as a means to earning justification; rather, good works are the experience and expression of the sanctification process that continues until we are glorified in Heaven. ([Fellowship Bible Church](#))

Here is a very poignant illustration of real faith versus fake faith from Pastor Matt Cassidy...

It is not unlike just a few years ago, 2002, Kansas City had the highest death rate among cancer patients. What was very peculiar in this situation is that it was in one neighborhood. If you lived in this neighborhood and you had cancer, the probability of your dying was two or three times higher than anywhere else in the country. This was a very curious thing. After years of investigation, it turned out that the pharmacist in that local neighborhood was diluting all the medications he was giving out in order to double and triple his profit. He had done this for ten years - 4,200 patients - 100,000 different prescriptions given out over that 10-year period of time. Everybody taking a pill, thinking it was truthful yet they were taking it and it was more like a placebo. The medication had no effect. It was **useless**. It was death to them. It led, quite literally, to their death. What would be worse: To take a pill, not knowing that it had no effect on you; or to know a pill had no effect but you took it anyway living with the consequences? There is no "C" option, take the right pill. What if you had to choose between not knowing what was right and what was a lie – or knowing what was right and what was a lie but just choosing to ignore it. Personally, I would go with knowing what was right and just living foolishly or clumsily. When I come to my senses, at least I would know what to do and where to go. This person over here

is in a state of ignorance and they think they are doing the right thing.

James is talking to this person over here saying – You might think you have the right faith but it is just not doing anything. If it is not doing anything, it can't be real. He is very passionate about this. He is convincing and convicting at the same time because he wants every single person there to know – Look. If you have certain symptoms and they continue, you are not on medication. I don't know what you are on but it is not the right stuff. It is **useless**. It is ineffective. It is death. If you are on the right stuff, you take the one that is good for your soul. It has evidence. It has fruitfulness. It has joy and benefits and consequences. ([Reference](#))

In summary, James is saying that genuine faith, like a fruit tree that is not artificial but alive, will reveal its life by the fruit it produces. This fruit (or deeds) is not some added extra any more than breath is an added extra to a living body.

Here again we find that there is no disagreement between James and Paul for Paul spoke of judging any profession of faith in Galatian writing that...

the only thing that counts is **faith** expressing itself through love (Gal. 5:6NIV).

**Comment:** Saving faith proves its genuine character by works of love. The one who lives by faith is internally motivated by love for God and Christ (Mt 22:37, 38, 39, 40), which supernaturally issues forth in reverent worship, genuine obedience, and self-sacrificing love for others.

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### J C Ryle...

We must be holy, because this is the only sound evidence that we have a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The twelfth Article of our church says truly, that

"Although good works cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment, yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith; insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by its fruits."

James warns us there is such a thing as a dead faith, a faith which goes no further than the profession of the lips and has no influence on a man's character (James 2:17). True saving faith is a very different kind of thing. True faith will always show itself by its fruits; it will sanctify, it will work by love, it will overcome the world, it will purify the heart. I know that people are fond of talking about deathbed evidences. They will rest on words spoken in the hours of fear and pain and weakness, as if they might take comfort in them about the friends they lose. But I am afraid in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, such evidences are not to be depended on. I suspect that, with rare exceptions, men die just as they have lived. The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is holy life. Those who live unto the Lord are generally the only people who die in the Lord. If we would die the death of the righteous, let us not rest in slothful desires only; let us seek to live His life. It is a true saying of Traill's: "That man's state is nothing, and his faith unsound, that finds not his hopes of glory purifying to his heart and life." ([Holiness](#))

Sanctification is the invariable result of that vital union with Christ which true faith gives to a Christian. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit" (Jn 15:5). The branch which bears no fruit is no living branch of the vine. The union with Christ which produces no effect on heart and life is a mere formal union, which is worthless before God. The faith which has not a sanctifying influence on the character is no better than the faith of devils (Jas 2:19-note). It is a "dead faith, because it is alone." It is not the gift of God. It is not the faith of God's elect. In short, where there is no sanctification of life, there is no real faith in Christ. True faith works by love. It constrains a man to live unto the Lord from a deep sense of gratitude for redemption. It makes him feel that he can never do too much for Him that died for him. Being much forgiven, he loves much. He whom the blood cleanses walks in the light. He who has real lively hope in Christ purifies himself even as He is pure (James 2:17, Jas 2:18, 19, 20-note; Titus 1:1NIV-note; Gal. 5:6; 1Jn 1:7; 3:3-note). ([ARE WE SANCTIFIED](#))

Let us set aside, in the next place, all those who know the Gospel with their heads—but do not obey it with their hearts. These are those unhappy people who have eyes to see the way of life—but have not will or courage to walk in it. They approve sound doctrine. They will not listen to preaching which does not contain it. But the fear of man, or the cares of the world, or the love of money, or the dread of offending relations, perpetually holds them back. They will not come out boldly, and take up the cross, and confess Christ before people (Ro 10:9, 10). Of these also the Bible speaks expressly, "Faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone." "To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin." "If any man is ashamed of Me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's,



and of the holy angels." (Jas 2:17; 4:17; Lk 9:26) Shall we say that such as these will be saved? The answer is clear to my own mind—In their present condition they will not. ([FEW SAVED](#))

## James 2:17: Fruitless Faith

### C H Spurgeon

Whatever the statement of James may be, it could never have been his intention to contradict the gospel. It could never be possible that the Holy Spirit would say one thing in one place, and another in another. Statements of Paul and of James must be reconciled, and if they were not, I would be prepared sooner to throw overboard the statement of James than that of Paul. Luther did so, I think, most unjustifiably. If you ask me, then, how I dare to say I would sooner do so, my reply is, I said I would sooner throw over James than Paul for this reason, because, at any rate, we must keep to the Master himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought never to raise any questions about differences of inspiration, since they are all equally inspired, but if such questions could be raised and were allowable, it were wisdom to stick fastest to those who cling closest to Christ. Now the last words of the Lord Jesus, before he was taken up were these, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," and what was this gospel? "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." To that, then, we must always cling, but Jesus Christ has given a promise of salvation to the baptized believer, and he has said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

Here it is clear he promises everlasting life to all who believe in him, to all who trust in him. Now from the Master's words we will not stir, but close to his own declaration we will stand. Be assured that the gospel of your salvation as a believer, with a simple confidence in Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead, will save your soul, a simple and undiluted reliance upon the life and death, and resurrection, and merit, and person of Jesus Christ, will ensure to you everlasting life. Let nothing move you from this confidence: it hath great recompense of reward. Heaven and earth may pass away, but from this grand fundamental truth not one jot or tittle shall ever be moved. "He that believeth in him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God."

The fact is, James and Paul are perfectly reconcilable, and they are viewing truth from different standpoints, but whatever James may mean, I am quite confident about what Paul means, and confident about the truth of the two.

A second remark. James never intended, for a moment, nor do any of his words lead us into such a belief, that there can be any merit whatever in any good works of ours. After we have done all, if we could do all, we should only have done what we were bound to do. Surely there is no merit in a man's paying what he owes; no great merit in a servant who has his wages for doing what he is paid for. The question of merit between the creature and his Creator is not to be raised; he has a right to us; he has the right of creation, the right of preservation, the right of infinite sovereignty, and, whatever he should exact of us, we should require nothing from him in return, and, having sinned as we have all, for us to talk of salvation by merit, by our own works, is worse than vanity; it is an impertinence which God will never endure.

"Talk they of morals,  
O! thou bleeding Lamb,  
The best morality is love of thee."

Talk of salvation by works, and Cowper's reply seems apt: —

"Perish the virtue, as it ought, abhorred,  
And the fool with it, who insults his Lord."

**What James does mean, however, is this, no doubt, in brief and short, that while faith saves, it is faith of a certain kind** No man is saved by persuading himself that he is saved; nobody is saved by believing Jesus Christ died for him. That may be, or may not be, true in the sense in which he understands it. In a certain sense Christ died for all men, but since it is evident that many men are lost, Christ's dying for all men is not at all a ground upon which any man may hope to be saved. Christ died for some men in another sense, in a peculiar and special sense. No man has a right to believe that Christ peculiarly and specially died for him until he has an evidence of it in casting himself upon Christ, and trusting in Jesus, and bringing forth suitable works to evince the reality of his faith.

The faith that saves is not a historical faith, not a faith that simply believes a creed and certain facts; I have no doubt devils are very orthodox; I do not know which church they belong to, though there are some in all churches; there was one in Christ's Church when he was on earth, for he said one was filled with devils; and there are some in all churches. Devils believe all the facts of revelation. I do not believe they have a doubt; they have suffered too much from the hand of God to doubt his existence! They have felt too

much the terror of his wrath to doubt the righteousness of his government. They are stern believers, but they are not saved; and such a faith, if it be in us, will not, cannot, save us, but will remain to all intents and purposes a dead, inoperative faith, it is a faith which produces works which saves us, the works do not save us; but a faith which does not produce works is a faith that will only deceive, and cannot lead us into heaven.

## **I. What Kind Of Works They Are Which Are Necessary To Prove Our Faith If It Be A Saving Faith.**

The works which are absolutely necessary are, in brief, these:

### **(1) First, there must be fruits meet for repentance, works of repentance**

It is wrong to tell a man he must repent before he may trust Christ, but it is right to tell him that, having trusted Christ, it is not possible for him to remain impenitent. There never was in this world such a thing as an impenitent believer in Jesus Christ, and there never can be.

Faith and repentance are born in a spiritual life together, and they grow up together. The moment a man believes he repents, and while he believes he hath believes and repents, and until he shall have done with faith he will not have done with repenting.

If thou hast believed, but hast never repented of thy sins, then beware of thy believing. If thou pretendest now to be a child of God, and if thou hast never clothed thyself in dust and ashes; if thou hast never hated the sins which once thou didst love: if thou dost not now hate them, and endeavor to be rid of them, if thou dost not humble thyself before God on account of them, as the Lord liveth, thou knowest nothing about saving faith, for faith puts a distance between us and sin; in a moment it leads us away from the distance between us and Christ; nearer to Christ, we are now far off from sin.

But he that loves his sin, thinks little of his sin, goes into it with levity, talks of it sportively, speaks of sin as though it were a trifle, hath the faith of devils, but the faith of God's elect he never knew. True faith purges the soul, since the man now hunts after sin that he might find out the traitor that lurks within his nature; and though a believer is not perfect, yet the drift of faith is to make him perfect; and if it is faith to be perfected, the believer shall be perfected, and then shall he be caught up to dwell before the throne.

**Judge yourselves, my hearers. Have you brought forth the fruits of repentance? If not, your faith without them is dead.**

### **(2) Works of secret piety are also essential to true faith**

Does a man say I believe that Jesus died for me, and that I hope to be saved, and does he live in a constant neglect of private prayer? Is the Word of God never read? Does he never lift up his eye in secret with "My Father be thou the guide of my youth"? Has he no secret regard in his heart to the Lord his God, and does he hold no communion with Christ his Savior, and is there no fellowship with the Holy Spirit? Then how can faith dwell in such a man? As well say that a man is alive when he does not breathe, and in whom the blood does not circulate, as to say that a man is a believer with living faith who does not draw near to God in prayer, that does not live indeed under the awe and fear of the Most High God as ever present, and seeing him in all places. Judge yourselves, ye professors. Are ye neglecting prayer; have ye no secret spiritual life? If so, away with your notion about saving faith. You are not justified by such a faith as that, there is no life in it; it is not a faith that leads to the Lamb and brings salvation; if it were, it would show itself by driving you to your knees, and making you lift up your heart to the Most High.

### **(3) Another set of works are those which I may call works of obedience.**

When a man trusts in Jesus, he accepts Jesus as his Master. He says, "Show me what thou wouldst have me to do." The Father shows what Christ would have him to do. He does not set up his own will and judgment, but he is obedient to his Master's will. I will not to-night speak of those who know not their Lord's will, who shall be beaten with few stripes, but I do fear that there are some professors who are living in wilful neglect of known Christian duties, and yet suppose themselves to be the partakers of saving faith.

Now a duty may be neglected, and yet a man may be saved; but a duty persistently and wilfully neglected, may be the leak that will sink the ship, or the neglect of any one of such duties for the surrender of a true heart to Christ does not go such and such a length and then stop. Christ will save no heart upon terms and conditions; it must be an unconditional surrender to his government if thou wouldst be saved by him. Now some will draw a line here, and some will draw a line there up to this and say, "I will be Christ's servant"; that is to say, sir you will be your own master, for that is the English of it; but the true heart that hath really believed saith, "I will make haste, and delay not to keep thy commandments; make straight the path before my feet, for thy commandments are not grievous." "I have delighted in thy commandments more than in fine gold."

Now, sons and daughters of sin, professedly, what say you to this? Have you an eye to the Master, as servants keep their eye to their mistress? Do you ever ask yourselves what would Christ have you to do? or do you live habitually in the neglect of Christ's law and wills? Do you go to places where Christ would not meet you, and where you would not like to meet with him? Are some of you in the habit of professing maxims and customs, upon which you know your Lord would never set his seal? You say you believe, you

have faith in him? **Ah! sirs, if it be a living faith, it will be an obedient faith.**

#### **(4) Living faith produces what I shall call separating works.**

When a man believes in Jesus, he is not what he was, nor will he consort with those who were once his familiars. Our Lord has said, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Now Christ was not an ascetic; he ate and drank as other men do so that they even said of him a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, because he mingled with the rest of mankind; but was there ever a more unearthly life than the life of Christ? He seems to go through all the world a complete man in all that is necessary to manliness, but his presence is like the presence of a seraph amongst sinners. You can discover at once that he is not of their mould, nor of their spirit, only harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

Now such will the believer be if his faith be genuine, but this is a sharp cut to some professors, but not a whit more sharp than the Scripture warrants. If we are of the world, what can we expect but the world's doom in the day of the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ? If ye find your pleasure with the world, you shall meet your condemnation with the world; if with the world you live, with the world you shall die, and with the world you shall live again for ever, lost. Where there is no separation there is no grace. If we are conformed to this world, how dare we talk about grace being in our souls; and if there be no distinguishing difference between us and worldlings, what vanity it is, what trifling, what hypocrisy, what a delusion for us to come to the Lord's table, talking about being the Lord's sons, when we are none of his? Faith without the works which denote the difference between a believer and a worldling is a dead, unsaving faith.

Now I have not said that any believer is perfect. I have never thought so, but I have said that if a believer could be a believer altogether, and faith could have her perfect work, he would be perfect, and that in proportion as he is truly a believer, in that proportion he will bring forth fruit that shall magnify God and prove the sincerity of his faith.

#### **(5) One other set of works will be necessary to prove the vitality of his faith, namely, works of love.**

He that loves Christ feels that the love of Christ constrains him; he endeavors to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ; he longs to win jewels for Christ's crown; he endeavors to extend the boundaries of Christ's and Messiah's kingdom, and I will not give a farthing for the loftiest profession coupled with the most flowing words, that never shows itself in direct deeds of Christian service. If thou lovest Christ, thou canst not help serving him. If thou believest in him, there is such potency in what thou believest, such power in the grace which comes with believing, that thou must serve Christ; and if thou serve him not, thou art not his.

### **ILLUSTRATION OF A TREE**

This proof, before we leave it, might be illustrated in various ways. We will just give one. A tree has been planted out into the ground. Now the source of life to that tree is at the root, whether it hath apples on it or not; the apples would not give it life, but the whole of the life of the tree will come from its root. But if that tree stands in the orchard, and when the spring-time comes there is no bud, and when the summer comes there is no leafing, and no fruit-bearing, but the next year, and the next, it stands there without bud or blossom, or leaf or fruit, you would say it is dead, and you are correct; it is dead. It is not that the leaves could have made it live, but that the absence of the leaves is a proof that it is dead.

So, too, is it with the professor. If he hath life, that life must give fruits; if not fruits, works; if his faith has a root, but if there be no works, then depend upon it the inference that he is spiritually dead is certainly a correct one.

When the telegraph cable flashed no message across to America, when they tried to telegraph again and again, but the only result following was dead earth, they felt persuaded that there was a fracture, and well they might, and when there is nothing produced in the life by the supposed grace which we have, and nothing is telegraphed to the world but "dead earth," we may rest assured that the link of connection between the soul and Christ does not exist.

I need not enlarge. We should just put it into that one sentence: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Bring forth, therefore, works meet for repentance.

## **II. Some Facts That Back Up The Doctrine That "Faith Without Works Is Dead."**

These facts show that it is evident to all observers that many professors of faith without works are not saved. It would be very ludicrous, if it were not very miserable, to think of some who wrap themselves in the conceit that they are saved about whose salvation nobody but themselves can have any question.

I remember a professor who used to talk of being justified by faith who was most assured about it, when he contained most beer. Such professors are not at all uncommon, sad is it to say so. They seem at the moment when their condemnation seems written on their very brow to all who know them, to be most confident that they themselves are saved.

Now, brethren, if such cases are convincing and you entertain no doubt, but decide in their case, apply the same rule to yourselves, for although you may not plunge into the grosser vices, yet if you make your homes wretched by your selfishness, if you fall into constant habits of vicious temper, if you never strive against these sins, and the grace of God never leads you out of them; if you can live in private sin, and yet pacify your conscience, and remain just as you were before your pretended conversion; when you sit in judgment and pronounce the verdict on others, feel that you pronounce it upon yourself, for surely for one sin that is openly indulged in, which is manifested to you in the dissipation of your fellow-creatures, it is not hard for you to believe that any other sin, if it be constantly indulged and be loved, will do the same to you as it does to him.

You know men who have not faith, but have a sort of faith, are not saved. It must be true, or else where were the Savior's words, "Straight is the gate and narrow the way, and few there be that find it"? For this is no straight gate and no narrow way, merely to be orthodox and hold a creed, and say, "I believe Jesus died for me"; but it is a very narrow gate so to believe as to become practically Christ's servants, so to trust as to give up that which Christ hates.

Truths which Jesus bids us believe are all truths, which, if believed, must have an effect upon the daily life. A man cannot really believe that Jesus Christ has taken away his sin by such sufferings as those of the cross, and yet trifle with sin.

A man is a liar who says, "I believe that yonder bleeding Savior suffered on account of my sins," and yet holds good fellowship with the very sins that put Christ to death. Oh! sirs, a faith in the bleeding Savior is a faith that craves for vengeance upon every form of sin. The Christian religion makes us believe that we are the sons of God when we trust in Christ. Will a man believe that he is really the Son of God, and then daily and wilfully go and live like a child of the devil? Do you expect to see members of the royal court playing with beggars in the street?

When a man believes himself to possess a certain station of life, that belief leads him to a certain carriage and conversation, and when I am led to believe I am elected of God, that I am redeemed by blood, that heaven is secured to me by the covenant of grace, that I am God's priest, made a king in Christ Jesus, I cannot, if I believe, unless I am more monstrous than human nature itself seems capable of being, go back to live after just the same fashion, to run in the same course as others, and live as the sons of Belial live.

We see constantly in Scripture, and all the saints affirm it, that faith is linked with grace, and that where faith is the grace of God is; but how can there be the gift of God reigning in the soul, and yet a love of sin and a neglect of holiness? I cannot understand grace reigning and vice ruling over the living and incorruptible seed which abideth for ever to the inner man; and for this man to give himself up to be a slave of Satan is a thing impossible.

**Faith, again, is always in connection with regeneration.** Now regeneration is making of the old thing new; it is infusing a new nature into a man. The new birth is not a mere reformation, but an entire renovation and revolution: it is making the man a new creation in Christ Jesus. But how a new creature, if he has no repentance, if he has no good works, no private prayer, no charity, no holiness of any kind, regeneration will be a football for scorn. The new birth would be a thing to be ridiculed, if it did not really produce a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness. That kind of "new birth" is a kind of new birth which ought to excite the derision of all mankind, for children are said to be born again, certified to be born again, made members of Christ and children of God, and afterwards they grow up, in many cases, in most cases, let me say, to forget their baptismal vows, and live in sin as others do. Evidently it has had no effect upon them, but regeneration such as we read of in the Bible changes the nature of man, makes him hate the things he loved, and love the things he hated. This is regeneration: this is regeneration which is worth the seeking: it always comes with faith, and consequently good works must go with faith too. But we pass on to the last matter, which is this:

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### III. What Of Those Men That Have Faith, And That Have No Good Works?

Then what about them? Why, this about them, that their supposed faith generally makes them very careless and indifferent, and ultimately hardened and depraved men.

I dread beyond measure that any one of us should have a name to live when we are dead; for an ordinary sinner who makes no profession may be converted, but it is extremely rare that a sinner who makes a profession of being what he is not is ever converted. It is a miserable thing to find a person discovering that his profession has been a lie. A man sits down, and he says, "Why, I believe," and as he walks he is careful, because he is afraid of what others might say. By and bye, he begins to indulge a little. He says, "This is not of works; I may do this, and yet get forgiveness." Then he goes a little further away. I do not say that perhaps at first he goes to the theater, but he goes next door to it. He does not get drunk, but he likes jovial company. A little further and he gets confirmed in the belief that he is a saved one, and he gets so much confirmed in that idea that he thinks he can do just as he likes. Having sported on the brink without falling over, he thinks he will try again, and he goes a little further and further until I may venture to say, if Satan wants raw material of which to make the worst of men, he generally takes those who profess to be the best, and I have

questioned whether such a valuable servant of Satan as Judas was could ever have been made of any other material than an apostate apostle. If he had not lived near to Christ, he never could have become such a traitor as he was. You must have a good knowledge of religion to be a thorough-faced hypocrite, and you must become high in Christ's Church before you can become fit tools for Satan's worst works. Oh! but why do men do this? Oh! what is the use of maintaining such a faith? I think if we do not care to get the vitality of religion, I would never burden myself with the husks of it, for such people get the chains of godliness without getting the comforts of godliness. They dare not do this, they dare not do that; if they do they feel hampered. Why don't they give up professing? and they would be at least free; they would have the sin without the millstone about their neck. Surely there can be no excuse for men who mean to perish coming to cover themselves with a mask of godliness! Why cannot they perish as they are? Why add sin to sin by insulting the Church through the cross of Christ?

**When men make a profession of religion, and yet their works do not follow their faith, what about them?** Why, this about them. They have dishonored the Church, and, of all others, these are the people that make the world point to the Church and say, "Where is your religion? That is your religion, is it?" So it is when they find a man who professes to be in Christ, and yet walks not as Christ walked. These give the Church her wounds; she receives them in the house of her friends; these make the true ministers of God go to their closets with broken heart, crying out, "Oh! Lord, wherefore hast thou sent us to this people to speak and minister amongst them, that they should play the hypocrite before thee?" These are they that prevent the coming in of others, for others take knowledge of them, as they think religion is hypocrisy, and they are hindered, and, if not seriously, they get, at any rate, comfort in their sin from the iniquity of these professors. What their judgment will be when Christ appeareth it is not for my tongue to tell; in that day when, with tongue of fire, Christ shall search every heart, and call on all men to receive their judgment, what must be the lot of the base-born professor, who prostituted his profession to his own honor and gain? He sought not the glory of God. What shall be the thunder-bolt that shall pursue his guilty soul in its timorous flight to hell, and what the chains that are reserved in blackness and darkness for ever for those who are wells without water and clouds without rain? I cannot tell, and may God grant that you may never know. Oh! may we all to-night go to, Christ Jesus, humbly and freely confessing our sins, and take Christ to be our complete Savior in very deed and truth. Then shall we be saved, and then, being saved, we shall seek to serve Christ with heart, and soul, and strength.

#### ILLUSTRATION OF A VESSEL DRIFTING

Lest I have missed my mark, this one illustration shall suffice, and I have done. There is a vessel drifting. She will soon be on the shore, but a pilot is come on board; he is standing on the deck, and he says to the captain and crew, "I promise and undertake that, if you will solely and alone trust me, I will save thy vessel. Do you promise it; do you believe in me?" They believe in him; they say they believe the pilot can save the vessel, and they trust the vessel implicitly to his care. Now listen to him. "Now," says he, "you at that helm there!" He does not stir. "At the helm there! Can't you hear?" He does not stir! He does not stir! "Well but, Jack haven't you confidence in the pilot?" "Oh! yes. Oh! yes, I have faith in him," he says; "he will save the vessel if I have faith in him." "Don't you hear the pilot, as he says have faith in him, and you won't touch the helm?" "Now, you aloft there! Reef that sail." He does not stir, but lets the wind still blow into the sail and drift the vessel on to the coast "Now then, some of you, look alive and reef that sail!" But he does not stir! "Why, captain, what shall I do? These fellows won't stir or move a peg." But "Oh!" says the captain; "I have every confidence in you, pilot. I believe you will save the vessel." "Then why don't you attend to the tiller, and all that?" "Oh! no," says he; "I have great confidence in you. I don't mean to do anything." Now when that ship goes down amid the boiling surges, and each man sinks to his doom, I will ask you, had they faith in the pilot? Hadn't they a mimicking, mocking sort of faith, and only that? For if they had been really anxious to have the vessel rescued and have trusted in the pilot, it would be the pilot that had saved them, and they could never have been saved without him. They would have proved their faith by their works. Their faith would have been made perfect, and the vessel would have been secured.

I call upon every man here to do what Christ bids him. I call upon you, first of all, to prove that you believe in Christ by being baptized. "He that believeth in Christ and is baptized shall be saved." The first proof that you believe in Christ is to be given by yielding to the much despised ordinance of believers' baptism, and then, having done that, going on to the other means of which I have spoken. Oh! I charge you by your soul's salvation neglect nothing Christ commands, however trivial it may seem to your reason. Whatever he saith unto you, do it, for only by a childlike obedience to every bidding of Christ can you expect to have the promise fulfilled, "They that trust in him shall be saved." The Lord bless these words, for his name's sake. Amen.

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[\*\*Henry Drummond\*\*](#) tells of the genesis (pathogenesis) of the **Infidel Club** in Glasgow, Scotland. Some men were standing at the corner of a street when a wealthy appearing man went past and one of the men observed he was founder of the Infidel Club in Glasgow. But the other man queried how that could be seeing that the wealthy man was an elder in the church, so how could he also be the founder of **Glasgow's Infidel Club**. The other man then explained how the wealthy church elder's inconsistent life had borne such false witness to Christ for so long that it had undermined the faith of several young men who had joined together to form the what they called **The Infidel Club**. Genuine faith has good deeds.

**Ralph Erskine**, a seventeenth century Scottish clergyman explained the relation of faith and works as follows...

True faith is never alone, but still joined with gospel-obedience: "As ye have received, so walk." He that would disjoin faith from obedience endeavors to walk with one foot, which is impossible. Faith and works, faith and holiness, are the two feet by which a man doth walk in Christ: and when the Spirit of Christ doth promote the one, He doth promote the other also. If a man should assay to go upon one foot, he could not walk, but only hop, which would be impossible for him to continue long in: neither can obedience be without faith, nor faith without obedience, but according to the measure of faith, such will be the measure of the gospel-walk. As the fuller a vessel is the faster will it run over at the top; so, the fuller view a man gets of Christ, by faith, the faster will he run in the way of evangelical obedience.

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John Angell James - **Of little use** - "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by works, is dead." James 2:17

True religion begins in right believing and goes on to right doing; and right believing must, through the whole of the Christian life, be the guide of right doing.

Faith is the root, out of which grows the whole tree of our godliness—its trunk, its branches, its leaves, and its fruit. It is faith which, striking its fibers into the Word of God as its proper soil, draws up the moisture which nourishes it, and which has first come down from heaven. It is only as we understand this, that we can begin or continue in a course of true, practical, and experimental religion.

To merely understand the grand truths of Scripture, is of little use—unless they produce . . . repentance, faith, love, and holiness.

That is not right faith which does not lead to practice; and that is not a right practice which does not spring from faith. (John Angell James. *Jewels from James*)

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**Kent Hughes** writes about a cartoon in *The New Yorker* that showed a large sign out in front of a church which read:

**"The Lite Church:** 24% Fewer Commitments, Home of the 7.5% tithe, fifteen-minute sermons, forty-five-minute worship services. We have only eight commandments—your choice. We use just three spiritual laws. Everything you've wanted in a church ... and less!"

Unfortunately that cartoon paints an accurate picture. Many people today are looking for a "lite church," a "lite faith," and a "lite commitment." In the passage we're studying today, James asks each of us a question, "Is your faith genuine?" How can we know if we have real faith or "lite faith?"...

Belief and Behavior—If you don't live it, you don't believe it.

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Faith in many ways is like a wheelbarrow. You have to put some real push behind it to make it work

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A line from a **Rich Mullins** song says, "Faith without works is like a screen door on a submarine."

It's worthless and it sinks. Do you claim to have faith? Does your life really show it? A workless faith is a worthless faith. We must ask ourselves, "If I were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?"

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**From the Peanut Gallery:** The *Peanuts* comic strip written by Charles Schulz once featured a brilliant illustration of faith without works: Charlie Brown and Linus come across Snoopy shivering in the snow. Charlie says, "Snoopy looks kind of cold, doesn't he?" Linus replies, "I'll say. Maybe we'd better go over and comfort him." They walk over to the dog, pat his head, and Charlie Brown says, "Be of good cheer, Snoopy." Linus adds, "Yes, be of good cheer." In the final frame, the boys are walking away, still bundled up in their winter coats. Snoopy is still shivering, and over his head is a big "?".

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**Faith without Works:** "No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same anymore than he can come into contact with a 220-volt wire and remain the same."—Warren Wiersbe

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"A person who professes Christ but who does not live a Christ-honoring, Christ-obeying life is a fraud."—John MacArthur

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**A Story of Fruitful Faith** - In the late '60s and early '70s, Keith Green was highly influenced by his culture. As an aspiring and incredibly talented musician on the rise, he experimented with eastern religions and drugs. In 1975, however, he gave his life to Jesus Christ and his music changed to reflect an energetic faith. While inspirational or worshipful, it was also exhortative, asking



questions like, “How can you be so dead, when you’ve been so well fed?” And, “How can you be so numb, not to care if they come? You close your eyes and pretend the job’s done; don’t close your eyes and pretend the job’s done!” His life reflected his faith: he took in the homeless, the drunks, the drug abusers, and anyone else. His Spirit-filled music and ministry to the needy yielded much fruit. (all the above from Morgan, R. J. Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook : 2004 Edition. Page 218. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers)

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An old boatman painted the word “faith” on one oar of his boat and “works” on the other. He was asked his reason for this. In answer, he slipped the oar with “faith” into the water and rowed. The boat, of course, made a very tight circle. Returning to the dock, the boatman then said, “Now, let’s try ‘works’ without ‘faith’ and see what happens. The oar marked “works” was put in place and the boatman began rowing with just the “works” oar. Again the boat went into a tight circle but in the opposite direction. When the boatman again returned to the wharf, he interpreted his experiment in these strong and convincing words, “You see, to make a passage across the lake, one needs both oars working simultaneously in order to keep the boat in a straight and narrow way. If one does not have the use of both oars, he makes no progress either across the lake nor as a Christian. ([10,000 sermon illustrations. Dallas: Biblical Studies Press](#))

Another version - Two Oars - A familiar story tells of an old Scotsman who operated a rowboat to transport passengers. On one oar he had written the word Faith, while the other bore the word Works. The point of the story, of course, is that pulling on either oar alone would simply make one go around and around in circles. Both oars must be used to make any progress at all.

## WHATEVER YOU DO

James 2:26

Rob Morgan

**For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also** James 2:26

Today we’re coming to the end of our series of messages entitled 365: Obedience for Everyday Living, from James 1 and 2. Next Sunday is Easter and I’m planning to preach an evangelistic message from John 3:16, so I hope you’ll bring your friends with you. And then two weeks from today, on the Sunday after Easter, Lord willing, I’d like to begin a new series of messages from James 3, 4, and 5 entitled Faith in Action. And in that way we’ll complete our study through the book of James.

It’s taken us ten Sundays and ten messages to look at chapters 1 and 2 of James, but we can say that the theme of the book is summarized in the verse we’re looking at today: For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. James is interested in making sure that our faith is not just a verbal faith, or an intellectual faith, or a passive faith. He wants our faith to be the determining force in our lives; it should permeate whatever we do.

The message of the book of James is that our Christian faith cannot be compartmentalized. It can’t be relegated to church or to Sunday mornings. It’s got to kick in on Mondays and Tuesdays and every day of the week. It’s got to work in a demonstratable way at school and on the basketball court and on the golf course and at home.

In America today, there is still a very high percentage of people who believe in God and who go to church, and yet all of us see the corruption of our society and of our culture. There is a disconnect for many people in our society between their belief in God and their everyday values and words and actions. But the core teaching of the book of James is that our faith should be pervasive, that it should radiate into every area of our lives.

Now today’s message is a little different. Instead of giving you an exposition of the passage as we’ve been doing week after week in James, I’d like to show you a phrase that occurs repeatedly in the Bible. I want to read a series of verses from a number of translations so you’ll see the preponderance of this emphasis in Scripture, and then we’ll focus on the three verses in the New Testament. Listen to these passages and notice how all-inclusive the Christian faith should be in our lives:

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully keep all His commands that I am giving you today....  
Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be blessed. Dt 28:1NLT, Dt 28:6NLT

This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night, so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. Joshua 1:8 (HCSB)

Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. Proverbs 16:3NIV

Plan carefully what you do, and whatever you do will turn out right. Proverbs 4:26 (GNT)

Work hard at whatever you do. Ecclesiastes 9:10 (GNT)

Do faithfully whatever you do... 3 John 1:5NRSV

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23NIV

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17NIV

Remember that God is going to judge you for whatever you do. Ecclesiastes 11:9 (GNT)

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 1Corinthians 10:31NIV

The Bible says, Whatever you do... whatever you do... whatever you do... The life of faith is not confined to an hour on Sunday morning; it isn't merely a verbal or intellectual or passive faith. It is pervasive, it radiates through whatever we do. Now, let's just take three of those verses and apply them with an emphasis on total-life faith. The apostle Paul used the phrase **whatever you do** on three occasions, and two of those were in one chapter, Colossians 3:17:

### **Whatever You Do, Do It Thankfully** (Colossians 3:17)

First, whatever you do, do it thankfully. Look at Colossians 3:17: And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Whatever we do—whether it's a word that we say or some action that we undertake—we're to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, as Christ's ambassador, as though Christ Himself were doing it, as a Christian. And we should speak that word or perform that task with a spirit of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving transforms every word and deed and day into something special.

Recently at a used book store I picked a volume of poems by Helen Steiner Rice, and I've enjoyed them so much. I didn't know much about Mrs. Rice, but let me tell you a little about her story. Helen Steiner was born in Ohio in 1900, and in high school she dreamed of going on to college and of running for Congress—lofty ideas for a woman in the early years of the twentieth century. But her father's death in the flu epidemic of 1918 changed all that, for she had to become the family breadwinner. She eventually became the spokesperson for an electric light and power country and traveled across America giving speeches on the advantages of having electricity in the home.

After several years, she opened her own speaker's bureau and became a popular motivational speaker. While on a gig in Dayton, Ohio, she met her future husband, banking executive Franklin Rice, and the two were married in 1929, just in time to lose everything in the stock market crash and Great Depression. While Franklin, having lost his job, sank into despair, Helen went out and found a job as the "Ambassador of Sunshine" for the Gibson Art Company in Cincinnati. One day in October of 1932, as she was at work in Cincinnati, Franklin committed suicide and left her a widow at age 32.

Shortly afterward when the greeting card editor at Gibson died suddenly, Helen applied for the job, and for the next forty years she churned out cards, verses, and poems like an assembly line—over two million of them by one estimation. There were poems for every occasion—Christmas, birthdays, Easter, graduation, funerals, weddings, and holidays. Since Gibson frowned on religious sentiments, most of Rice's poems were sentimental and secular. But in the 1960s, she began writing poems expressing the truths of Scripture. When one of them, "The Priceless Gift of Christmas," was read nationwide on the Lawrence Welk Show, Helen Steiner Rice became a household name, and she was soon known as "America's Poet Laureate of Inspirational Verse." Books of her poems hit the shelves of bookstores around the world, and her time was consumed in writing poems and in responding personally to her reading public.

Late in life, Helen suffered from increasingly painful and crippling arthritis, and at about age eighty she had to give up her work. "I'm ready to go be with the Lord," she told one visitor in her convalescent home. "I can't wait to shed this aching body.... I'm ready for heaven." She passed away on April 23, 1981.

One of her poems is entitled Make Every Day Thanksgiving:

Thank you, God, for everything—  
the big things and the small,  
For every good gift comes from God—  
the giver of them all,

Too often we accept  
without any thanks or praise  
The gifts God sends as blessings  
each day in many ways,  
O, make us more aware, dear God,  
of little daily graces  
That come to us with sweet surprise  
from never-dreamed-of places,  
And help us to remember  
that the key to life and living  
Is to make each prayer a prayer of thanks  
and every day THANKSGIVING.  
(Helen Steiner Rice, Poems of Faith  
(Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1981, 143.)

That's a life of faith; that's faith in action. Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, so it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

**Whatever You Do, Do It Wholeheartedly** (Colossians 3:23)

Second, whatever you do, do it faithfully, wholeheartedly, and enthusiastically. Glance down the page and look at Colossians 3:23: Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

The remarkable thing about this passage is that it was addressed originally to those in the Roman Empire who were slaves. You see, this is the section of Colossians in which Paul is giving instructions to various groups. In verse 18, he speaks to wives. In verse 19, he speaks to husbands. In verse 20, he speaks to children. In verse 21, he speaks to fathers. And in verses 22 he speaks to slaves, and then in chapter 4, verse 1, he addresses masters. So in verses 22 and following, he wrote: Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence to the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

The Romans practiced slavery, and widespread segments of the population were in the bondage of slavery. But the Apostle Paul said, "Even if you're a slave, do your work with enthusiasm. Do it the best you can. Do it for the Lord, not for your earthly master, and God will reward you with a rich inheritance."

This is a phenomenal message: Wherever you find yourself, do it with all your heart. If you're a student, be the best student you can be. If you're a homemaker, be the best homemaker you can be. If you're a factory worker, or a white collar worker, or a sales representative, or a choir member, or a nursery worker, or a professional athlete—whatever you do, do it with enthusiasm. Do it wholeheartedly. And do it for the Lord, and not for men, for it is the Lord Christ you are serving; and from Him you will receive an eternal inheritance.

Maybe you're saying, "I hate my job. How can I be enthusiastic about it?" Well, one way is to start acting as if you were enthusiastic. When we think of enthusiasm as it relates to American presidential history, we think of Teddy Roosevelt, who tackled whatever he was doing with a burst of enthusiasm and courage that was just spectacular. Where did that come from?

Roosevelt grew up as a sickly and awkward boy who suffered terribly from asthma. But as a boy he read a passage in a book that made a deep impression on him. In that passage, the captain of some small British man-of-war ship explained to one of his sailors how to acquire the quality of strength and fearlessness. In this story that TR read, the captain said that at the outset almost every man is frightened when he goes into war and into action, but "the course to follow is for the man to keep such a grip on himself that he can act just as if he were not frightened. After keeping this up long enough, it changes from pretence to reality, and the man does in very fact become fearless by sheer dint of practicing fearlessness when he does not feel it."

Roosevelt said, "This was the theory upon which I went. There were all kinds of things of which I was afraid at first, ranging from grizzly bears to 'mean' horses and gun-fighters; but by acting as if I was not afraid I gradually ceased to be afraid." (Quoted by Dorothy Carnegie in Dale Carnegie's Scrapbook (Garden City, NJ: 1959), 15.)

The same theory holds true with enthusiasm, and it is a faith-action for Christ. The Bible tells us that when we're in the will of the Lord, we should work at whatever we do with all our heart as working for Christ. We should do it wholeheartedly and enthusiastically, and so by faith we plunge in. And we work hard. And we work faithfully. And we work enthusiastically. And we work for the Lord Christ. And from the Lord Christ comes the strength and the enthusiasm and the fearlessness and the reward.

So here are two qualities—enthusiasm and thanksgiving—that are the most powerful psychological and spiritual attitudes known to us. Enthusiasm and thanksgiving can alter any personality, improve any life, and transform any home. But there's a third quality, a third "whatever you do" statement in the writings of the apostle Paul.

### **Whatever You Do, Do It Worshipfully** (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Look at 1 Corinthians 10:31: So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Whatever we do, we should do it worshipfully. All of life is an act of worship. Even the smallest things we do every day—eating a snack, having a drink at the water fountain, sitting down for supper—whatever we do, we should do it for God's glory. All of life is doxology.

That means that upon awakening in the morning, we praise God from whom all blessings flow. We bathe and dress that we might be presentable in our service for the Lord. We eat and drink, asking God to bless the food for our bodies, and our bodies for His service. As we go about our housework or labor at office, factory, or school, it's as His ambassador. Our exercise and entertainment is purposeful—that we might remain healthy and happy in our service for Him. Crawling into bed at night, it's another day finished for Jesus and we fall asleep praising Him the goodness and mercy that follows us all our days.

Worship is a lifestyle, and our every moment and movement is for Him. This is, in Charles Spurgeon's phrase, the art of holy and happy living.

This was one of the great discoveries of the reformation. One of the great Reformation phrases that will ring throughout the church as long as the church endures was *Soli Deo Gloria*—To God Alone Be the Glory. When Martin Luther and the Reformers launched the Reformation in 1517, at that time there was a Latin word that was used to designate the ministry. It was the Latin *vocatio*, which meant calling. Our English word *vocation* is the exact transliteration of this word.

In the Middle Ages, when someone talked about vocation (vocation), it was always referring to the calling to fulltime church work. Priests, nuns, and monks had a special calling, a special task, a *vocatio*. But Luther said, in effect, that whatever vocation God leads us into, whatever our calling in life, whatever our work, it is a holy calling. If God calls you to be a teacher or builder or accountant or plumber or truck driver, that's where He wants you to serve Him, to bear witness for Him, and that is a holy and an honorable calling. That is your *vocatio*, your vocation, your calling. All of life should be lived for the glory of God alone—*Soli Deo Gloria*.

That's why, later, another German, the musician Johann Sebastian Bach, considered his musical skills as a gift from God and his vocation as a musician as a holy calling. And if you go to the British Museum in London and you look at Bach's original scores, you'll notice that at the end of his pieces—whether they were spiritual or secular in nature—are the letters SDG—*Soli Deo Gloria*—for the glory of God alone.

Stephen J. Nichols, in his excellent little book on the Reformation, observed: "Luther and Bach, both significant figures from the pages of history, remind us that in our seemingly ordinary work and life we are doing something extraordinary. Francis Schaeffer said it well, 'There are no little people, no little places.' When we live life, all of it, for the glory of God, we are engaged in the most profound of activities. We are doing something that matters truly and ultimately. In the service of the glory of God there is nothing little at all." (Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation: How A Monk and a Mallet Changed the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 33.)

The English poet George Herbert wrote:

Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things Thee to see,  
And what I do in anything  
To do it as for Thee.  
George Herbert

This is what James is talking about in chapters 1 and 2 of his book. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. Our faith—if it's real—must be pervasive in life. Jesus Christ should be Lord of every day, every moment, every word, and every activity.

And whatever we do, we work at it with all our hearts, as working for the Lord, not for men, since we know that we will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ we are serving.

And whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

And whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do it all for the glory of God

## FAITH THAT'S WORTH SOMETHING

James 2:14-26

by Rob Morgan

Recently we've been greatly encouraged by the reports of what our Life Groups and our members have been doing in a benevolent way to touch this world by meeting needs in human lives. Recently, for example, three members of our church returned from a ten-day trip to the Ivory Coast of West Africa with The Hannah Project, the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) that we support. This trip involved three members from our church and a number of people from other churches, including doctors, nurses, emergency personnel, builders, and volunteers. The stories of what they did are incredible. They treated one boy who had been crippled by a fall from a tree and who was suffering from large bedsores and infected feet and toes. They treated a woman who actually had a broken rib protruding from her skin. They operated on an elderly man who had been injured in a car wreck ten years ago and was still suffering from a severely twisted leg and knee problem. They removed a cyst from the face of a feisty little boy. Day after day in primitive conditions they performed operations, administered first aid, treated patients, diagnosed eye problems, gave out glasses, and even painted a local school and built a basketball court. And during all of it, they shared the Gospel and saw souls won to Christ.

It was Faith in Action, and this is the kind of faith the New Testament talks about. We're in a series of messages from the book of James, and today we're coming to the last half of chapter 2 of this book. What James has to say in this chapter is that the faith that saves us must be an active faith, a real faith, a faith that demonstrates itself in good works. We aren't saved by good works. We're saved by faith alone; but the faith that saves us is a faith that demonstrates itself every day. The passage we're studying this morning is at the very core of the book of James 2:14-26:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 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? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did. 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. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteousness for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Now, it's not hard to spot the main point that James is driving home. It's the main point of this paragraph, and it's the main point of the entire book. Notice how James repeats himself to make sure we don't miss his emphasis:

- What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?—James 2:14
- Faith by itself if not accompanied by action, is dead—James 2:17
- Faith without deeds is useless—James 2:20
- Faith without works is dead—James 2:26

Now, James is not saying that we are saved by works; we are saved by faith alone. The point James is making is that true saving faith will manifest itself by works. We are not saved by works, but we are saved by a faith that is active enough to produce works. We aren't saved because we feed the poor and come to church and keep the ordinances. We can never work our way into God's favor by our own efforts, for our very hearts are sinful beyond measure. We are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, which He accomplished when He died on the cross and rose from the dead. We are saved by the blood of the Crucified One. But it's got to be real faith, and real faith is not passive faith; it's an active one. Look at the way James unfolds this.

### **It's Not Enough to Verbally Believe (James 2:14-17)**

First, in James 2:14-17, he tells us that it's not enough just to claim that we believe: What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

There's the principle—it's not enough just to claim that we believe. Lots of people call themselves Christians. Lots of people go to church and claim to be followers of Christ. But that's not enough. If we have true saving faith, it will be demonstrated by our compassion for others, by our love, by our concern for the needs of others, by our charity and willingness to help those in need. Let's read on:

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 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? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

To most of us, this seems like common societal sense. We may not always live up to this standard, but it seems reasonable to us. It seems Christian, Christlike, and compassionate. But when James wrote this, his words represented a radical change from the prevailing attitude of Roman society.

Many of us don't realize how Christianity transformed western society into a culture of compassion. In the days of Jesus and of James, the world was a brutal place and human life cheap. The Greco-Roman world was cruel, and life was expendable. For example, the killing of babies was widespread. If a child was deformed or physically frail, that child would typically be killed. The Roman statesman Seneca wrote, "We drown children who at birth are weakly and abnormal." They had no sense of compassion on a child who could not grow up to be, in their view, a productive member of society.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world of Jesus and the apostles, there was no compassion or charity for the sick and dying. If you had a disease, it was better to perish and get out of everyone's way, or else you'd be a burden to society. Even Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, said that when a poor man—especially a slave—was no longer able to work because of age or sickness, he should be left to die.

In those days without sanitation and with crowded conditions in the cities, there would be terrible outbreaks of the plague, but there was no one willing to care for the sick. The wealthy would flee to their homes in the country and the sick would be isolated so as not to contaminate the rest of the population.

And then there was the brutality of gladiatorial games. Great crowds of Romans gathered in their stadiums and watched people mauled and mangled and gored to death. One writer said that these games illustrate the complete pitiless spirit and carelessness of human life. The agonizing deaths, the flow of human blood, and the barbaric cruelty didn't bother the crowd at all. Instead the crowd would cry, "Lash him! Brand him! Kill him!" And the crowds cheered to see people stabbed to death or torn apart by wild animals.

Several years ago, Katrina and I visited Rome and we toured the ancient Coliseum that was built in the days immediately following the deaths of Peter and Paul. When that Coliseum was inaugurated by Emperor Titus in AD 80, 5000 wild animals were killed in one day along with an unknown number of gladiators whose blood saturated the sand.

Slavery was so widespread that the entire Roman economy was dependant on it. Torture was a way of life in the Roman legal system, and Josephus tells of mass crucifixions. The Roman roads were lined with crosses on which people were slowly writhing in agony, sometimes for days, before they died.

And into this compassionless, corrupt, cruel world, Jesus Christ came caring for the sick, the aged, the lepers, the downcast, the outcast, and the castaways. He said that if we perform an act of compassion for the least individual in human society, we've done it unto Him. James drove home the advice by telling us repeatedly in his book to care for the widows and orphans, and to respond to those who approach us in need.

This was a new way of thinking. The early Christians shocked the world by bringing to it a care and a concern for widows and orphans and the sick and aged and needy and dying. Roman society was astounded that when the plague hit and the black death came that Christians would enter infected houses to care for the sick. In fact, one writer has suggested that this had much to do with the growth of Christianity.

"The care Christians showed often did result in their succumbing to the plague themselves. But paradoxically, their compassion did not deplete Christian ranks in the long term—quite the reverse. Tending to the sick increased the disease survival rate by as much as two-thirds, and this witness attracted many new converts. By acting on the teachings of Christ, without regard to their own welfare, these Christians, against all expectations, progressed from being a small sect to the dominant cultural force." (Charles Colson and Harold Fickett, *The Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), p. 17.)

We have the story of one Roman soldier in the army of Emperor Constantine, a man named Pachomius, who had been swept up and drafted against his will. All he had ever seen was brutality and hardness of heart. And then he observed some Christians bringing food to his fellow soldiers who were afflicted with famine and disease. He asked about these people and was told they were Christians, and that their faith caused them to care for those in need. He had never heard of such a thing. He had never seen such



a thing. He had never imagined such a thing. He investigated these people, learned about their faith, and became a Christian himself.

One of the most interesting statements about this that I've ever read is in Dr. Alvin J. Schmidt's book, *How Christianity Changed the World*: "When modern secularists show compassion today upon seeing or hearing of some great human tragedy—for example, massive starvation, earthquake, disasters, mass murders—they show that they have unknowingly internalized Christianity's concept of compassion. Even so-called objective news reporters often find it difficult to hide their emotions when they report major calamities on radio or television. But had those reporters not grown up under the two-thousand-year-old umbrella of Christianity's compassionate influence, they would probably be without much compassion, similar to the ancient Greeks, Romans, and others. As Josiah Stamp has said, 'Christian ideals have permeated society until non-Christians who claim to live a "decent life" without religion, have forgotten the origin of the very content and context of their "decency."'" (Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 131. I am indebted to Professor Schmidt for some of the insights I relate in this section of the message.)

In Charles Colson's new book, *The Faith*, he tells about his organization Prison Fellowship, which is devoted to reaching prisoners who are incarcerated in prisons around the world and to caring for their families. One of the adjuncts of their ministry is what they call their Angel Tree program, which is very much like the one we sponsor here every Christmas, but with a difference. They ask volunteers to buy gifts for the children of men and women who are locked away in prison. Up in Oregon there was a small church that participated in this program, and one Sunday the pastor opened his study door and there were three small children: a five-year-old old boy, with his three-year-old brother, and his two-year-old sister. The oldest looked up and asked shyly, "Mister, can we see the church that brought us those Christmas presents?"

The pastor immediately knew who these children were. Their father was locked up in prison and their mother was involved in drugs and prostitution. "Of course you can see the church," he said. "Come on in." He gave them a tour of the building and the children seemed happy and were on their way.

But fifteen minutes later, they were back at the door. "What time does church start?"

"In an hour."

"We'll be back." And the kids scampered away once more.

Fifteen minutes later they were back again, this time with another question: "Is it okay for a person to come to church if his socks don't match?"

"Of course," said the pastor.

"What about if he doesn't have any socks? Mine don't match. My brother, he don't have any."

"You look more than fine to me," said the pastor. "Let me find you a seat." A couple sitting nearby helped the children through the service, but they were puzzled by a brown paper bag the oldest boy was clutching. It turned out to contain one hot dog. The children were worried the service would last too long and had brought a lunch. They had planned to split the hot dog among the three of them. Well, the church informally adopted those children and they became a permanent part of the congregation. Christians found them in their need, reached out in love, and gave them a structure and a message of hope in their lives. (Charles Colson and Harold Fickett, *The Faith* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, p. 157.)

So James says, "It's not enough just to claim to believe; but how do you treat someone who's sick? How do you respond to a legitimate need? How do you endeavor to meet the needs of others? How do you care for the sick, the orphans, and the widows.

### **It's Not Enough to Intellectually Believe** (James 2:18-19)

Second, it's not enough just to intellectually believe. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe there is one God. Good!

Monotheism—the belief in one God—is at the core of both the Jewish and the Christian faith. It's good to believe in one's mind that there is one God. So far so good. But it is not enough.

Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

From time to time we read of surveys in the newspaper or magazines trying to chart the religious trends of the nation. A surveyor will ask a sampling of people, "Do you believe in God? Do you believe in Jesus?" And a large percentage of Americans will say, "Yes, I believe in God and I believe in Jesus."

If our surveyor asked that question of the devil or of any of the innumerable hosts of demons, the answer would be, "Yes. We believe in God. We believe in Jesus." If fact, there are illustrations of that in the Gospels. Do you remember reading about times when Jesus would approach someone who was demon possessed, and the demon would cry out in fear, as in Mark 1:24: What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

The devil and the demons are very religious in terms of their intellectual beliefs. But when the Bible talks about true faith and saving faith, it's talking about more the mere intellectual assent or acknowledgement.

### **It's Not Enough to Passively Believe** (James 2:20-26)

Third and finally, James said that it's not enough to just passively believe. Look at James 2:20: You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

And now he's going to use two examples from the Old Testament, and he chooses two people from opposite ends of the social and spiritual spectrum—a patriarch and a prostitute. One is a Jew; in fact, he's the father of Judaism. The other person is a Gentile. One is a man and the other is a woman. But both people were heroes of the faith, and neither had a passive faith. They had a faith that was demonstrated by their courage and actions.

First, James brings us Abraham, who was also Paul's great example of faith in Romans 4: Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

In other words, when God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham believed that God knew what He was doing. Abraham believed that God had a plan. Abraham believed that God would fulfill His promises made to and through Isaac. And Abraham believed that God could raise the dead, if necessary. And so Abraham acted on his faith, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

His second example is Rahab, from the book of Joshua 2 (Josh 2:1-3, 6:17, 23, 25). I don't have time to tell the story, but suffice it to say that Rahab believed God and she believed that God was going to give the Promised Land to the descendants of Abraham as He had said. She also believed that God could save her and her family. And so at great personal risk, she hid the two spies and later tied a scarlet cord to her window as instructed.

It's not enough to say that you believe. It's not enough just to call yourself a Christian. It's not even enough to intellectually believe. It's not enough to have a quiet passive faith that never manifests itself in obedience or good works. We need a faith that shows itself in courage, in obedience, in charity, and in good works.

And it begins when we take a concrete step of making Jesus Christ the Lord and Master of our lives. Perhaps you've thought that you had faith in Christ, but it's been a verbal faith, an intellectual faith, a passive faith, but not an active faith of trust and obedience. The Lord Jesus bids us come, to follow Him, and open the door of our hearts, and to say, "Now, Lord Jesus, out of sheer faith, I follow You; I commit myself to a life of obedience and service."

That's a faith that's worth something!