



CAPITOL COMMISSION

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COLORADO

James 2:14 A Dead Faith, Part 1

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Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, struggled for years to gain salvation by his own "righteous" works and yet realized his deeds always fell short of righteousness. Try as hard as he may, it was useless. He could never be righteous. Only until he read Paul's writings in Romans did he come to understand that he was justified not by his works, not by his "righteousness", but rather he was saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Because he could never merit salvation on his own, he came to understand the part of grace in salvation as God's free gift that could never be earned. Martin Luther saw that salvation is by grace alone, through Christ alone and by faith alone. It was then that Luther entered into the kingdom of heaven as a new creature and was saved. Thus, when he read James, Luther could not believe that this book had any right to be included in the New Testament. Did Paul and James proclaim two different ways of salvation or are they merely looking at justification from two different perspectives.

Paul emphasized the way of justification but James emphasizes the life of the justified. There are many who say they believe, but a true and genuine faith will result in good works. Any type of faith will not save. Therefore, if someone says they believe but there is no evidence of that faith in the way they live, it is not a true and genuine faith. James emphasized the fact that it matters how we live, not because we earn our salvation from our works, but rather because our actions, our works, reveal whether our faith is real. If we say we believe, there will be a difference in our life. How we live is a reflection of a transformed heart. As believers we are different, because Christ has made a difference. God now rules in us to do His purpose, His will. In Romans 6:4 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, it is clear that salvation brings about a newness of life. That newness of life then reflects a change in the way we live, for true faith will result in good works and a lifestyle that is obedient to Jesus Christ. With that in mind, let's see what James says.

I. TRUE FAITH WORKS - JAMES 2:14-26

"(14)What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? (15)If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, (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? (17)Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. (18)But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (19)You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. (20)But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (21)Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? (22)You see that faith was working with his works, and a result of the works, faith was perfected; (23)and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. (24)You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. (25)And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she

received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (26)For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." James 2:14-26

We will spend several weeks examining these verses in James 2, contrasting a dead faith from James 2:14-20 with those who possess a living and active faith from James 2:21-26. James would say that a faith which doesn't result in obedience is a dead faith and then contrasts that dead faith with a living faith. If we say we have faith, it will be seen in obedience. Redemption will always bring about obedient living, even though there will be times of disobedience. If you say you have faith, if you say you are a believer, then you will demonstrate that by how you live.

II. A DEAD FAITH - JAMES 2:14, PART 1

A. TWO QUESTIONS - JAMES 2:14

"What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" James 2:14

We have seen thus far from James that a true and living faith is revealed by how we respond to trials, how we respond to temptations, how we respond to the Word and how we respond to our brother in need. Now he addresses the fact that a true and living faith works. Keep in mind that James is addressing, "my brethren", his fellow Jewish brethren (James 1:1) and the church at large. He begins by asking two questions.

1. WHAT USE IS IT? – JAMES 2:14A

James asks his first question with a phrase, "if a man says". It becomes clear this refers to one who "says" he has faith or belief in God. James does not say they are a true believer or that they possess saving faith. Rather, the emphasis is that this person claims to have saving faith, claims to be a true believer. There are many people who would fall into this category. They think they are Christians but their faith is not living and active, does not result in good works and therefore is dead.

"faith" Greek word "**pistis**," means a general knowledge of assent to, and confidence in certain divine truths, especially those of the gospel usually producing works, or sometimes, simply a knowledge and assent to religious truths without good works and therefore false faith.

So this person says he has faith, says he has a belief, but what? He has no works. James asks the question, what use is that? What are “works”?

“works” Greek word “*ergon*,” means work, performance, products produced, the results of working or making, in this context from faith, acts by which the man proves his genuineness and his faith.

James asks the question, is that faith of any value? If there is no result from that man’s faith, does it have any value? Does that faith have any benefit at all? The implied answer would be no, there is no benefit to that faith.

2. CAN THAT FAITH SAVE HIM? - JAMES 2:14B

Does a faith which doesn’t produce good works reveal a true and saving faith? James does not want there to be a false sense of security because a man’s soul for all eternity is at stake here. A faith which produces no good works is not useful or beneficial at all. That faith cannot save him.

By asking the question, James is not wondering if that kind of faith can save. No! This verse is structured so that the implied answer is in the negative. This kind of faith cannot save anyone. This question is not offered to dispute the importance of the faith, but to oppose the idea that just any kind of faith can save.¹

Our Lord said in Matthew 7:16-18, “*You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles are they? So a very good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.*” A true, living, saving faith will produce good works just as a good tree will produce good fruit.

James is dealing with the kind of faith that is an impotent faith, unable to save and thus is a faith with no value or worth. If the faith we say we possess bears no fruit, no good works, then, it is not saving faith. This is hard to hear in a world that suggests if we give any lip service to God, then we must be a Christian. But James says “no” to this notion. Yes, there is a “faith” that doesn’t save. It is a faith that has no works. It is a useless and dead faith offering no benefit in life and can lead to the delusion that one is saved. James does not want any to be deceived and therefore confirms that a faith without works reveals a dead faith that will never save. The following verses would be worth your time exploring regarding this issue.

- *Romans 2:6-10, 13-16*
- *Romans 11:6*
- *John 8:30-31*

- *Galatians 2:6*
- *2 Timothy 2:19*
- *Titus 1:16*
- *Titus 2:7*

Remember, we live in a day where if you go to church and say you believe, you must be a Christian. But James takes a true and living faith further than just a superficial, shallow talk. Genuine faith produces an obedient walk resulting in good works. Many profess to know Christ, but deny Him by the way they live. That faith is an empty confession.

James continues to emphasize the faith that it matters how we live. He tells us that a true and living faith is revealed by how we respond to trials, how we respond to temptations, how we respond to the Word, how we respond to our brother in need. Then James takes the next step by revealing that a dead faith is a fruitless faith of no earthly or eternal value or benefit. That faith is dead and useless but a living faith produces righteousness and saves. John Calvin wrote the following:

“FAITH ALONE JUSTIFIES, BUT THE FAITH THAT JUSTIFIES IS NEVER ALONE.”

Paul says to test ourselves, examine ourselves and see if we are in the faith, if our faith is real and genuine. He says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?*” Correct doctrine is not enough. It is not adequate to just say you believe. Is the result of your faith, good works? Or do you have a faith with no good works? Examine your faith, examine your life, and examine your walk...for it is of eternal significance!

¹ MacArthur, John, MacArthur Commentary on James. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg. 124.