



CAPITOL COMMISSION

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COLORADO

James 2:15-17 A Dead Faith, Part 2

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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. James takes a true and living faith further than just a superficial, shallow talk. Any type of faith will not save. 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, but 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. 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. As we go through James, honestly reflect on your faith; is it living...or is it dead? Remember, it matters how we live.

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

These verses from James 2:14-26 contrast a living, true and genuine faith with a dead and hypocritical faith. Our attention in this study will focus on James 2:15-17. Is there a faith that cannot save? Yes, it is a faith that has no works. A faith with no demonstration of good works is a dead faith and absolutely useless and powerless to save. James doesn't want anyone to be deceived about their salvation.

II. A DEAD FAITH - JAMES 2:15-17, PART 2

How can we discern a dead faith from a living faith, a real faith from a

hypocritical faith? James answers this question in these verses, for one with a dead faith has no love outside of a love for one self. A dead faith is merely a verbal concern for those in need that is no more than a hypocritical sham.¹

A. OPPORTUNITY FOR FAITH IN ACTION - JAMES 2:15

“What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,” James 2:14-15

This verse gives the illustration of the principle James has set forth in verse 14. Here there is an opportunity for ones faith to respond to a brother or sister in need.

1. “WITHOUT CLOTHING” – JAMES 2:15A

“without clothing” Greek word **“gumnos,”** means ill dressed, stripped of the upper, outer garment, poorly clothed, suggesting they were cold and miserable due to lack of proper clothes.

The example James gives is first of one who does not have adequate clothing. Keep in mind that James is referring to people who have a long standing need rather than one that is short term or temporary.

2. “IN NEED OF DAILY FOOD” - JAMES 2:15B

Not only is this brother or sister without adequate clothes, but also in need of food.

“in need of daily food” Greek word **“leipo ephemeris trophe,”** means a lack, a wanting of a regular daily course of food or nourishment, a deficient amount of available or regular food. Does not indicate starvation, but rather insufficient nourishment for normal, healthy living.

¹ MacArthur, John, MacArthur Commentary on James. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg. 126.

So here is an individual who has a sincere need. This brother or sister does not have enough clothing to stay warm and lacks sufficient nourishment on a daily basis. What is the response?

B. RESPONSE OF DEAD FAITH - JAMES 2:16

“What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 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?” James 2:14-16

Clearly James is portraying an attitude of total disregard for the need of those around us. “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled” is a statement of self absorbed, heartless, selfishness. It is essentially like saying “God bless you” sarcastically while having and showing no care at all. This is an indifferent, cruel statement which points the needy to warm and feed themselves.

1 John 3:17 says, “Whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” James essentially raises the same point in verse 16 where he asks, “what use is that?” James says that just as professed compassion without kindness and care is phony, so is that faith which is nothing but an empty claim.²

C. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD - JAMES 2:17

“What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 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? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” James 2:14-17

James makes it clear in verse 17 that true living faith is an action word. If there is no action, it is a dead faith. The absence of good works indicates the absence of saving faith as evidenced by a changed life. (Matthew 7:13-29) A genuine faith doesn’t just demonstrate an acknowledgement of a need, but rather sees the opportunity to meet a need. True faith will demonstrate an abandonment of sin and an abandonment of self by giving and serving our brother and sister in need. A faith without works as illustrated by these verses is dead, lifeless, useless, worthless. Do not be deceived, that faith reveals a life in need of examination, a life in need of salvation.

What about you? Can you pass by your brother or sister without helping? Remember, we learned earlier that your brother or sister is anyone you pass by on the road of life that has a need. Are you willing to genuinely help or do you just offer a token, “I’ll be praying for you” when you could be the

answer to your own prayer. A true believer is one who lives out God’s Word. That saving faith is always accompanied by visible acts and evidences. When there is no demonstration of good works, when there is no response to a need, when there is no love or compassion, this is a dead faith which is hypocritical and false, powerless to save, vain and useless.

Is your faith a living and active faith, or is it a dead and useless faith?

May this be our prayer:

*“Lord,
Grant that my religion may not be
Occasional and partial,
But universal, influential, effective,
And may I always continue in Thy words
As well as Thy works,
So that I may reach my end in peace.”
Author Unknown*

² MacArthur, John, MacArthur Commentary on James. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg. 127.