

WHICH ROAD WILL YOU TAKE?

A STUDY IN JAMES

How to Energize Our Faith

This lesson looks into dead faith, demonic faith, and dynamic faith. Hopefully, from studying today's passage, we will energize our faith and put it to work better serving the Lord. John Hart of the Moody Bible Institute writes, "The members of a small group Bible study gather to discuss personal evangelism, none of them have ever persistently shared their faith. How passionate do you suppose their conversation will be? The members of another small group Bible study also meet to discuss personal evangelism. But in this group, each Christian is taking bold steps to win others to Christ. They are actually doing evangelism, not just talking about it. It is not too difficult to visualize how differently each group might present their beliefs about reaching the non-Christian for the Savior. Nor is it too complicated to understand how one's belief in evangelism might be energized by the work of evangelism. Good works bring vitality and spirit to our faith."

Some may look at James' words on faith and deeds and conclude, "I know I'm a Christian and bound for heaven. By God's grace, I have done enough good works to show it." This group concludes that James' words are only for those who have false faith.

Others may take James' words and respond with an unhealthy questioning of their salvation. They think, "I've trusted Christ as my Savior and thought I was a Christian. But now I'm not sure if I really have enough good works to prove it." Regardless of which response (complacency or unhealthy introspection) the result harms the Christian spiritually and James' intent to energize our faith is overlooked.

Therefore, let's examine today's passage from *James* with freshness and openness.

Dead Faith

Read James 2:14-17 (ESV) ¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James is deeply troubled by an attitude that sees faith as a verbal confession only. *Speaking* our faith without *doing* our faith cannot meet practical needs. Dennis Davidson writes, "Beware of mere intellectual faith. 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." Christians show forth works of love that prove their faith is real.

Let's be clear. We are not saved by our works – we are saved by God's grace. The concept of grace as found in the Bible is summed up in the definition "undeserved favor." We are saved by grace, not by a mixture of God's grace and our good works. According to Scripture, we can do nothing to earn salvation. Paul wrote:

Read Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Paul makes it clear that we are saved by grace. However, let's not overlook what Paul wrote next.

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

We are *created in Christ Jesus for good works*. We are not saved by good works, but saved for good works. The famous theologian John Calvin wrote, "It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone." We are not saved by faith plus good works, but by a faith that works. James points out that saving faith always results in a changed life.

Keep in mind, faith itself is not a "good work" that causes God to take notice of us. Faith is repenting of our sin, admitting that we are hopelessly and helplessly lost and unable to do anything to gain God's favor, then simply accepting the salvation that He offers freely.

Even in the early church there were those who claimed they had saving faith, yet did not possess salvation. Wherever there is the truth, you will find the counterfeit. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:21 (ESV)** ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

Wiersbe writes, "People with dead faith substitute words for deeds. They know the correct vocabulary for prayer and testimony, and can even quote the right verses from the Bible; but their walk does not measure up to their talk. They think that their words are as good as works, and they are wrong."

James is not implying that sound doctrine is unimportant or irrelevant. There is a strong emphasis throughout the entire Bible on the truth, with many warnings against false teachers. Saving faith must rest on Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. To believe in a Christ of your own imagination is to believe in an idol. To trust in someone or something for eternal life other than Jesus Christ and His death on the cross is to be deceived on the most important issue in life.

James provides a simple illustration of how words alone do not feed and clothe someone. I will say it again: *speaking* our faith without *doing* our faith cannot meet practical needs. This brings us to the question that every follower of Christ has struggled with at times: How do we respond to those who may be taking advantage of us while appearing to be in need? Paul answers this

question in **2 Thessalonians 3:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.* It may take some time to figure out for certain that someone is taking advantage of us. We are not commanded to be an accomplice for someone's laziness. We are not commanded to be a promoter for drug deals by supplying money. **Colossians 3:23 (ESV)** ²³ *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.* When the Lord puts it in your heart to help someone, by all means do it. Your gift will be to the Lord. Leave it with Him. However, when the Lord reveals that you have done enough, don't feel guilty. He does not call you to waste your resources.

Demonic Faith

Read James 2:18-19 (ESV) ¹⁸ *But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.* ¹⁹ *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

Possibly, James wanted to shock his complacent readers, so he used demons as his illustration. When our Lord was ministering on earth, He often cast out demons; and He gave that power to His disciples. Paul confronted demonic forces in his ministry. It comes as a shock to people that demons have faith! What do they believe? Demons are not atheists or agnostics. They believe in the existence of God. They also believe in the deity of God's Son, Jesus. Whenever they met Christ when He was on earth, they bore witness to His Sonship. They believe in the existence of a place of punishment; and they also recognize Jesus Christ as the Judge. They submit to the power of His Word. But it is not a saving experience to only believe and shudder. A person can be enlightened in his mind and even stirred in his heart and be lost forever. True saving faith involves something more, something that can be seen and recognized: a changed life.

Demons believe, yet, they remain demons. They do not love righteousness or hate sin. Unsaved people can believe about Jesus in their heads, yet still remain unsaved. Why? They possess an intellectual belief instead of a life-changing faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. In **Acts 8** we read of a man who *claimed to believe*, was baptized, but remained lost in sin. He was Simon the Sorcerer. Simon believed in the miraculous signs that Paul was performing, but not in the One whose power was behind those signs. True salvation is not a mere profession or ritualistic act. It is the divine transformation of the soul from love of self to the love of God, from the love of sin to the love of holiness.

There are two kinds of faith that can never save the sinner: [1] dead faith (the intellect alone) and [2] demonic faith (the intellect and the emotions). Finally, James mentions the third kind of faith – saving faith – dynamic faith is faith that is real, faith that has power, faith that results in a changed life. Faith that is willing to confront casual Christianity and flee from it.

Dynamic Faith

Read James 2:20-23 (ESV) ²⁰ *Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?* ²¹ *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?* ²² *You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;* ²³ *and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.*

Warren Wiersbe says, “Faith is only as good as its object. The man in the jungle bows before an idol of stone and trusts it to help him, but he receives no help. No matter how much faith a person may generate, if it is not directed at the right object, it will accomplish nothing. “I believe” may be the testimony of many sincere people, but the big question is, “In whom do you believe? What do you believe?” Believing that everyone is going to get to heaven somehow does not work with the LORD Almighty. We are not saved by *faith in faith*; we are saved by faith in Christ as revealed in His Word.”

James first gives the example of Abraham’s willingness to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering which occurred many years after the conversion of Abraham. His faith caused him to lift that knife to do a thing which he did not believe God would ever ask him to do. But since God had asked him, he was willing to do it. He believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead. James quotes **Genesis 15:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.* Faith and deeds are not opposites, they are inseparable. No one is moved to action for God without faith in Him.

James second example is Rahab.

Read James 2:24-26 (ESV) ²⁴ *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.* ²⁵ *And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?* ²⁶ *For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

Rahab’s story is exciting and contains one of the Bible’s great examples of saving faith. **Hebrews 11:31 (ESV)** ³¹ *By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.* Rahab heard the Word and knew that her city was condemned. Rahab responded with her mind and her emotions; but she also responded with her will meaning Rahab did something about it. She risked her own life to protect the Jewish spies, and she further risked her life by sharing the good news of deliverance with the members of her family. Rahab, who lived in a pagan city changed her life and became a woman of faith, ending up in the genealogy of Jesus. **Matthew 1:5**, What a testimony! Rahab exercised *dynamic* faith. She proved her faith by her works. When you consider the small amount of information Rahab had about the God of Israel, you can see how truly marvelous her faith really was. Let’s be energized in our faith remembering the words of the Apostle John in **1 John 5:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*