

Is Your Faith Dead or Alive **James 2:14-20 (NKJV)**

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 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? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

In our passage today James breaks down the difference between a dead faith and a living faith.

We usually do not think of faith in this way. But James is trying to emphasize the importance in a changed life for the Christian.

Back then as today it is easy to pretend to have something that you do not have.

And think of the tragedy of thinking that you have a saving faith only to discover that you did not. Or think of someone thinking they have a working parachute only to find out they do not. But then it is too late. If you have a dead faith, you had better find out now, rather than too late.

What James is trying to show us is the difference between genuine and fake faith.

There is not contradiction between Paul and James for as J. Vernon McGee says, "Paul and James do not stand face to face, fighting against each other, but they stand back to back, fighting opposite foes." *J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible Commentary: The Epistles (James), electronic ed., vol. 53 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 64.*

- I. Faith then is either living or dead.
 - A. Living faith comes from the Father.
 1. Every good gift comes from Him.
 2. It is the gift of God lest anyone should boast.
 - B. Dead faith is something that we develop ourselves or that others convince us that we have.
 1. Many have faith in baptism, instead of the one that baptism pictures.
 - a. Colossians 2:11-12 You were . . . buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with [Him] through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.
 2. Many have faith in their church rather than the one who is the head of the church.

- a. Ephesians 1:22 And He put all [things] under His feet, and gave Him [to be] head over all [things] to the church,
 - 3. Many have faith in prayer rather than the one who answers prayer.
 - a. John 14:14 “If you ask anything in My name, I will do [it].
 - 4. Some have faith in a system of religion rather than in the salvation we have in Jesus Christ.
 - C. There were some who seemed to have faith in Jesus but it seems they did not.
 - 1. John 2:23 ¶ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. 24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all [men], 25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.
 - 2. Many can get caught up in the moment but sometimes it is not real.
 - 3. They only have a superficial faith that will not last because it is not real.
 - 4. That explains how that a week after the Jewish people proclaimed Jesus as King that they wanted Him crucified.
 - D. For some it is purely an intellectual faith.
 - 1. That is why James says in verse 19 “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!”
- II. A living faith must have works while a dead faith does not.
- A. Genuine faith is not invisible but on display.
 - 1. James 2:18 (NKJV)
 - a. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.
 - 2. James is not disputing the importance of faith. Rather, he is opposing the notion that saving faith can be a mere intellectual exercise void of a commitment to active obedience. *John MacArthur Jr., ed., The MacArthur Study Bible, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1929.*
 - 3. Matthew 7:16–18 (NKJV) 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.
 - B. Works without faith will not save.

1. Some have good works but not saving faith.
 - a. Matthew 7:21-23
 - (1) 21 ¶ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’
2. 1 John 3:17 (NKJV)
 - a. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?
3. This is why John the Baptist required evidence of faith before he would baptize people.
 - a. Matthew 3:8 (NKJV)
 - (1) 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,

C. A faith that has no works will not save.

1. James 2:14 (NKJV)
 - a. 14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?
 - b. James is not contrasting two methods of salvation (faith versus works). Instead, he contrasts two kinds of faith: living faith that saves and dead faith that does not (cf. 1 John 3:7–10). *John MacArthur Jr., ed., The MacArthur Study Bible, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1930.*
2. In God’s sight it is faith and that alone is what God looks at for He knows the heart.
 - a. Romans 3:28 (NKJV)
 - (1) 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.
 - b. Galatians 2:16 (NKJV)
 - (1) 16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ

and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

3. He is condemning profession without practice and with that condemnation Paul would have entirely agreed. *William Barclay, Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Faith and Works (Jas 2:14-26)"*.

III. Two Examples

- A. These two were polar opposites! Yet in selecting these to prove his point, James casts a broad net that captures every one of us reading his words—every Christian finds him or herself somewhere between Abraham and Rahab. *Charles R Swindoll, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James, 1 & 2 Peter, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 59.*

B. Abraham, the father of the faithful.

1. Hebrews 11:17 (NKJV)
 - a. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

C. Rahab, the harlot.

1. Hebrews 11:31 (NKJV)
 - a. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

2. Could there be two people more different from Abraham than Rahab.

D.