

James 2:14-26

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[0 : 0 0] We're going through James. We're in James chapter 2. I'm going to handle verse 14 through the end of the chapter. It's verse 26. It's picking up where Sam left off. It was Sam, right? You preached last?

Me? Yeah. And I think the context is important because he was talking about partiality. And so James is going to segue into a different topic, but he didn't totally leave the context, which we'll see why in a minute here.

I'm going to go ahead and read the passage, and then they'll have some commentary. Okay. James chapter 2, verse 14. What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace. Be warm and filled.

Without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

[1 : 1 0] 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. You believe that God is one.

You do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.

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.

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 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?

[2 : 1 0] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. Okay, so this is a challenging passage.

The message seems pretty straightforward. It's challenging because if you take it at first glance, it seems to contradict other things the Bible says. I'm sure you might be thinking about some of those things. So I'm going to make a few points here before we dig into a deeper dive on these passages.

Number one is James is addressing a specific error. All right, so the Bible in totality is balanced.

When authors are writing to specific churches or combating specific errors, they might be unbalanced in how they present the thing.

And that's good. Okay? If you took just this passage and you derived the doctrine of justification by faith from it, you might get into some difficult territory. But James isn't trying to give a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of justification by faith.

[3 : 2 6] He's battling something. He's attacking an error. He's attacking something that's a deception, a twisting of the doctrine of justification by faith. And the specific error is antinomianism.

Antinomianism. I can't say it. Antinomianism is anti-law or cheap grace. Easy believism. Using the grace of God, the free grace of God, as a license for sin.

That's what he's attacking right here. This is what he's teaching against this. Antinomianism basically says, I can be saved without obeying God's commands.

Okay? That's the basic message. I can be saved and I don't have to obey God's commands. It's a license to sin. That's what antinomianism is. It's different than the error of legalism.

Legalism says, I'm saved by obeying God's commands. Okay? That's human effort. Both of these things are wrong. So, other parts of the Bible deal with legalism.

[4 : 30] James is dealing with antinomianism. He's attacking an error. So, that's important to keep in mind as we read this. Second, and related to this, is this passage does not contradict salvation by faith alone.

It seems that way. You know, maybe at a first go, it seems that way. But it doesn't. God's word does not contradict itself. God doesn't contradict himself. But he does clarify himself.

Okay? James is bringing clarity to something that, without what James has to offer here, we might not be quite as clear on. Okay? Okay?

So, I'm going to read a couple passages that are important to keep in mind as a backdrop. Romans 3.28 says, For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

No, that didn't start. In Ephesians 2, verses 8 through 9 says, For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.

[5 : 33] It is the gift of God. Not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Alright. These are true. James isn't saying these aren't true.

So, these are true. We've got to go into reading this knowing and being convinced that these are true. We are justified by faith alone. Alright? It's a wonderful truth.

This is what started the Protestant Reformation. So, he's not... James isn't denying salvation by faith, I guess is my point. He's refining what true faith really is.

Okay? He's bringing more clarity to what saving faith looks like. So, anyway, another point to keep in mind is, I think there's two basic ways of thinking about this passage.

One is, salvation is by faith plus works. Alright? You can think about salvation as like a table, and there's two legs on it. You've got a leg over here, that's faith. And you've got another leg that works, and you prop it up.

[6 : 32] You just kind of add these two things together, and boom, you get salvation. That's basically Rome's position. Right? And, but the second way of thinking about it, this is the way that I believe, I think this is what the Bible teaches, is that salvation is by faith that works.

Yeah. Okay? Okay? This is the Protestant position. This is what started the Protestant Reformation. Rome uses these passages to undermine the simplicity of the gospel.

We don't want to do that. But you don't want to go so far as to start giving a license for sin, which is Rome's criticism of a lot of Protestant churches. You know what? They're right.

Okay? Okay? So, the truth is, real faith reduces works. So, that's what James is talking about here. And I think the last point I want to mention before we dig into this, I think the key passage is the last verse, James 2.26. James 2.26.

[7 : 35] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. James is defining a kind of faith that doesn't save.

It's a definition. He's talking about a version of faith. And he's trying to put language to it. He does put language to it. It's a faith that doesn't produce works.

And he calls that dead faith. Okay? So, James isn't trying to undermine faith. And it's salvific, simple, saving power.

Okay? He's trying to attack something that says it's faith and sends you to hell. And it's a faith that doesn't have works. So, it's important to keep that in mind.

Saving faith is alive. Saving faith receives a living Christ. Christ. And Jesus Christ himself, when he comes into someone's life, he makes everything new. And he produces fruit in keeping with his character.

[8 : 38] He's the same. We'll talk about that more later on. But that's what James is trying to do. He's trying to separate and differentiate these two things that call themselves faith. And they're both in the church.

Unfortunately, they're both in the church. They might be in our midst today. Okay? So, it's important to hear this and ask yourself the question, do I have the real thing? Because that's what he wants to do for his hearers.

So, we're going to dig into this. James, chapter 2, starting in verse 14. I'm going to go verse by verse here. What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? James speaks here of a person who says, I believe in Jesus but doesn't obey his commands. And he asks the question, can such faith save him? It's rhetorical.

No. The implication is no. That's why he's asking. Verse 15. If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 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?

[9 : 45] So, he gives us an example. If you see your brother or sister, they're lacking in something essential. We don't want to get weird about this. There's a way of taking this and basically taking it to a logical conclusion of communism.

Everyone just has to have the same thing. And if you have two shirts and I have four shirts and I need to give you one of my shirts, we both have three shirts. That's not what he's talking about here. He's talking about real need.

Real need. Jesus talks about real needs. He defines what real needs are. Food, clothing, shelter, with these things be content. And he's saying, you're seeing people that are lacking things that God has said are needs, real needs.

And I think you can apply this spiritually too. And you're saying, not my problem. All right. Maybe I'll pray for you. You know, I'll pray for you. But you're obviously the answer to prayer.

Like, you are the person God put in their life to take care of that. And you say, not my problem. And he says, what good is that?

[10 : 58] Continue in verse 17. So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. What kind of faith do you have? That's the way you relate to the people God has put in your life.

You're like, I believe in God. And then you divest yourself of responsibility when God sends people your way. Especially people, it says brother, sister, people in the church. Not my problem.

No. You're in a scary position, is what he's trying to say. That's the way you relate to people. You need a reality check.

But someone will say, let's go moving on. Verse 18. 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. So James anticipates responses.

Last point. You know, you have faith, I have works. Or another way of maybe saying this is, are you saying we should trust in our works now? Are you undermining everything that we received here?

[12 : 02] You know, salvation by faith alone. And now you're telling me I got to do works. Is this like the other thing now? Now I got to do works to get saved? You know, like, what's the deal? He's like, no, no. Well, I will show you my faith by my works.

I'm going to reveal the reality of my saving faith by my works. You say you have faith, but you have no attendant fruit. You're not showing me that you believe just by saying, I believe.

Okay. That's not how you show you're a Christian. It's by going to church and say, yes, I believe in Jesus. I give to the church. I show up at, you know, church on Sundays. You know, I've always been a Christian.

And that's not how we show saving faith. We show saving faith by our works. That's the point that he's trying to make here. He's not saying you're saved by works.

Okay. He's not turning the gospel on its head and saying, no, no, no. Now you're saved by works. So anyway, he's anticipating that response. And that's his challenge is, no, no, no. I'm saying it communicates via works.

[13 : 04] Galatians 5, 6 says, for in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, circumcision. I can't say that. Nor uncircumcision counts for anything. But only faith working through love.

Faith, real faith, works through love. It's in living connection with Jesus. The Holy Spirit sheds abroad his love in our hearts and he produces good works in keeping with the character of Christ. That's just what faith does. Okay. It's not propositional only. You know, there's a, I think there's a way of thinking through faith that a lot of the reformers landed on like a formulation.

It's knowledge. It's knowing a truth. Assent. I agree with that truth. I'm assenting to that truth. That truth is true. And trust. Okay.

You trust in the Lord. It's a heart thing. I'm trusting in him. I'm not leaning on myself anymore. I'm leaning on him. And so I think that's, that's what he's starting to attack here is holding the first two.

[14 : 13] I know the gospel and I agree that it's true, but I haven't put my trust in the person of Jesus. Okay. Verse 19, continuing.

You believe that God is one. Here we go. Propositional truth. We believe God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. Okay.

Demons have the first two. They know the truth. They assent to the truth. But they don't trust him who is the truth. They shudder.

They're terrified. They're going to hell. This, this is why this point hits home. We all know where demons are going. They're going to hell. Okay. It's pertinent because if I only know the truth and assent to the truth, I have the same faith that demons have.

And I share their destiny. Matthew 25, verse 41 through 46. I'm just going to read this because I think it's pertinent. Jesus is speaking of the day of judgment.

[15:20] Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Remember, hell is prepared for the devil and his angels.

Okay. For I was hungry. You gave me no food. I was thirsty. You gave me no drink. I was a stranger. You did not welcome me naked. You did not clothe me sick and in prison. You did not visit me. Then they also will answer saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you? Then he will answer them saying, truly, I say to you, as you did not do it under the least of these, you did not do it unto me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. The reality of their faith was put on display by their actions or really lack thereof.

Look at every one of those as a relational interaction. Every single one of those. You saw a need. Not my problem. Okay. That's kind of faith demons have.

[16:28] It's not going to save them on the day of judgment. Moving on. Verse 20. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? He says, you want proof? Then he goes on to offer two examples from the Old Testament.

Verse 21. First example, Abraham. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works.

So, the word completed. I'm not even going to try to pronounce this Greek word here. You can, synonyms are perfected, brought to maturity, fulfilled.

So, we, I think, we can think of faith as having a beginning. Okay? And it does. It has a beginning. Abraham believed God.

It was counted to him as righteousness. Boom. But there's also a sense in which it has an end or like a telos, an aim, a mark of maturity, a completion.

[17:35] And that's what he's speaking about here. That, like, the end for which it was given. Ephesians 2, verses 8 through 10. This is one of the verses about justification by faith.

Okay? Let's continue reading the whole passage here. For by grace you've been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It's the gift of God. Not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For what purpose? For what purpose? For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

All right? So, it's in Ephesians. You're saved by grace through faith. It's a free gift of God. For what purpose? Good works.

God prepared ahead of time for us to walk in. So, this is basically exactly the same thing he's saying with Abraham. Abraham believed God. It was credited to him as righteousness. Day one. Okay? Day, you know, many days later, years and years later, he produced works that were in keeping with that faith and authenticated that faith and show that that was the real deal.

[18:49] Okay? There were works that God created beforehand for Abraham to walk in. And walking in those works, it didn't add to his faith. It just showed what it really was.

It was the real deal. So, continuing on here. Verse 23. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God. It was counted to him as righteousness. And he was called a friend of God. Okay? So, he's offering Isaac. It was another marker of faith. It took faith to do that. He was living by faith. So, the same faith that he had day one, God calls him out to, you know, leave his fathers behind, go out.

He didn't know where. He believed God. Well, later on, he's living by the same faith, and he's doing works that are producing insight into the true saving quality of that faith.

Verse 24. So, you see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Okay? So, this is one of the tricky passages. If you just took this verse and pulled it out and made a doctrine out of verse 24, you see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

[20:03] Well, you get the position of Rome. This is what the Catholic Church essentially believes. It has way more nuance than that. It's way more complicated than that. But if you boil it down and

just make it so something like a five-year-old can understand, it's faith plus works.

Okay? Which is the true test of any doctrine. You know, you boil it down to its bare essentials. What fruit does it produce? That's basically it. All right? Which is why it's so important not to yank verses out of context here.

So, it's really important to remember what's the goal James has in mind. Differentiating living faith from dead faith. Continuing on verse 25.

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? This is referring to when the children of Israel entering the promised land, they go to Jericho.

There's a prostitute in Jericho who hides the spies and allows them to escape. Well, she did that by faith. And she was counted righteous for that.

[21 : 02] But again, comparing scripture with scripture here, we see that her works are showing the existence of her justifying faith. Same as Abraham. Abraham offers up Isaac.

It shows his faith is working together with his works to show something. The same thing with Rahab here. For as the body, verse 26, continuing on here, for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

This wraps up James' whole argument here. His summary point is, dead faith is a thing. And it equals faith without works.

Propositional faith without attendant fruit. Okay? And he uses the analogy of a body. So, what do you call a body without a spirit?

A dead body. It's got all the form there. It's dead. It's not alive. It's a dead body. It's a body without a spirit. In the same way, he says, what do you call faith without works?

[22 : 12] Dead faith. It's dead. It has no life in it. It's a dead thing. Doctrine's right. Propositions are right.

No reality. No reality. Like a body without a spirit is dead. Faith without works is dead. Okay.

Okay. So, that's all my passages here. I want to say a few things. James talks a lot about what dead faith is. And I wanted to say a few things about, positively, about what living faith is.

First of all, living faith receives a living Christ. John 1, 12 through 13 says, speaking of Jesus, it says, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, receiving Christ and believing in his name, same thing.

Okay. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who are born not of blood or the will of the flesh nor the will of man, but of God.

[23 : 22] Saving faith. Saving faith receives a living Jesus. Okay. We're born again. You're different. You're a different person.

You're not some heathen carrying around some propositional truths about, you know, salvation by faith alone and using that to hide from God as a license to continue living however you want.

You're different. Okay. 1 John 5, verse 11 through 12. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life. And this life is in his son.

Whoever has the son has life. Whoever does not have the son of God does not have life. We receive Christ livingly. He's alive.

Okay. And we receive him. That's what saving faith is. You have Christ. You have life. You don't have Christ. You don't have life. That's what faith is.

[24 : 21] Second point. Jesus acts like himself. He's consistent. He's not one person when he was on earth 2,000 years ago and then somehow, you know, weirdly different in you.

Okay. If he's weirdly different in you, he's not in you. He's consistent. Bible says in Hebrews 13a that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Ephesians 3.17 says that Christ dwells in your heart through faith. He's consistent. He just acts like himself. That's what good works are. Okay. Good works are works produced by the Holy Spirit bringing the character of Christ to bear in our lives.

Okay. And Jesus is the same. He's just, he's always, he's always consistent. Jesus is the continuity, I guess is my point, between faith and works. We receive Christ as a free gift and when Christ lives in our life, he comes into our life, he produces works in keeping with his character.

Okay. So, a few exhortations just to wrap this up. this is the main point that he's getting across here is that dead faith is a real thing.

[25 : 38] It's real. Actual people that you know, maybe people in this room, have dead faith and they feel okay.

They feel okay with, I'm a Christian. I've always been a Christian. I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins.

I believe that. Yeah, I do. I do. No reality. No fruit. And it's real.

It's a real thing. We need to receive this and judge ourselves by the light of what James is saying here so that we don't have a made up definition of faith in our minds and our hearts.

Which is easy to do if you don't have a passage like James here where he dials things in and he hones, you know, he sharpens the pencil on what faith means. So, it's real.

[26 : 38] Titus 1.16 says, they profess to know God but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Consistent pattern of disobedience in life shows that you may not have saving faith. Okay? Do you have saving faith?

Do you repent? Do you flee sin in your life? Do you run like it's going to send you to hell because if you don't repent, you will? Is that your attitude towards it?

Praise God, you probably have saving faith. Do you say, I'll repent tomorrow? Okay. I'm not saying you're not a Christian but you are really getting into the category of people he's talking about here. Which brings me to my second point. Examine yourselves to see if you are in the true living faith. I'm just going to read a few passages here. And the goal of reading this is just to let the Bible help us examine ourselves.

[27 : 49] First one, 2 Corinthians 13.5 Examine yourselves to see whether you're in the faith. Same thing. Test yourselves or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail to meet the test.

He's saying look at yourselves. Test the authenticity of your own faith. Do you realize that Jesus is inside of you? Do you have like a real confident understanding that the person Jesus Christ lives inside of you and is changing you from the inside out?

If you don't have that experience you need to come to the Lord for that. Okay? Second passage Galatians 5 19-23 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature the results are very clear.

Sexual immorality impurity lustful pleasures idolatry sorcery hostility quarreling jealousy outbursts of anger selfish ambition dissension division envy drunkenness wild parties and other sins like these. Let me tell you again as I have before that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the kingdom of God. Okay. Long list there.

[29 : 10] Do you live that sort of life? If you live that sort of life you will not inherit the kingdom of God. It's very plain.

He's not asking you do you believe in Jesus? He's asking you do you live this sort of life? Why? Because a tree is known by its fruit.

If you have a saving relationship with Jesus he turns you away from living this sort of life now in real time. He puts the terror of the Lord in your heart so that you flee from sin through the Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives continuing here. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things. The Holy Spirit comes in and he produces a different kind of life. I'm not saying he produces sinless perfection overnight. That happens when Jesus comes back. In fact, one of the very clear signs that Jesus is living in your heart is he brings conviction of sin and he doesn't let you alone with it.

[30 : 24] You know, pray this for my kids. I pray that God would grant them conviction of sin and they would come to us without us provoking it. That they would not be able to rest with their sin.

Well, that's the work of the Holy Spirit. It's awesome. It points us to Christ. It shows us our need. It turns us to him. But if you go on living your life saying, ah, it's fine. Blood Jesus covers it. I'm fine. You're going to hell. Okay? That's what he's saying here. And you need to get rid of that vain confidence. You're putting your trust in dead faith. It's not real faith.

Ephesians 5, verses 5 through 6. For of this you can be sure. No immoral, impure, or greedy person, such a person is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of such things, God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. All right.

[31 : 25] Again, don't be deceived. 1 Corinthians 6, verses 9 through 11. This is the last one I'll read on this. Again, we're using these to examine ourselves. Do you not know that wrongdoers will

not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers nor inherit the kingdom of God.

And that is what some of you were. Past tense, were. But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Okay. I know it's a very common thing nowadays to take certain sins out of the Bible and identify with them. Homosexuality, obviously. Transgenderism. These are sins the Bible addresses. There's other stuff in here, though. Drunkenness. Slanderers. We want to use these as our identity.

[32 : 37] We're condemning ourselves to hell. Because he says, don't be deceived. These people will not inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were.

Past tense. But you were washed. How were you washed? By the blood of Jesus. You were sanctified. Okay? Sanctification, it doesn't happen overnight, but the Holy Spirit comes in and he starts fighting against sin and setting us free from the power of it.

Okay. So, I guess my last exhortation here, those are examining. My exhortation there was just examine yourselves. Okay? My last one is, you say you trust Jesus to save you from hell.

Do you trust him to save you from sin? I think a lot of times this is the real, this is the real differentiator. Many want to be saved from hell. The real question is, do you want to be saved from sin?

Because they're both true. They're both true in Christ. He does save us from the wrath to come. Matthew 1.21 says, this is about Jesus, Christmas time. Great Christmas time verse. Very applicable.

[33 : 40] She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. Emmanuel, Jesus, he is promised to save his people from their sins.

Not just the penalty of sin, from their actual sins that destroy them. Acts 3.26, God having raised up his servant, referring to Jesus, sent him to you first to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.

That's what it means to be blessed by God. We want God's blessings. Lord, bless me. I want to be blessed by God. Send me your blessings, Lord. His blessing is to turn you from wickedness.

Your sin is destroying you and sending you to hell. What greater blessing is there than to be turned from your sin? It's life. Sin is a deception, okay?

It's a total lie. It doesn't feel like that. It feels like, oh, that's good. Let me get some more of that good stuff and sprinkle me with some blood of Jesus afterwards and wash me clean and I can have my sin and my fun here on earth and I'll just come to Jesus and get washed clean and it's kind of best of both worlds.

[34 : 57] Get saved from hell and get to have as much fun with sin as I want to in this life. It's a total deception. It's killing you. And that's what he came to bless us by turning us away from that.

And it's trust. Trust is the key here. We're talking about faith. Faith trusts God for what he promises. He sent Jesus to be my Savior from sin. Do I trust him to save me from sin?

That's really the question we've got to ask. Is that the kind of faith I have? Lord, I believe that you came here to bless me by turning me away from wickedness and you have the power to do it.

So, that's it.