

The terms and conditions of the gospel

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[0 : 00] I'd now like to read a part of the Bible written by a man called Paul, who was a friend, a colleague of James, and along with James was one of the obvious pillars of the early church.

This is Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 1 to 10. And you were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

[1 : 28] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Amen. May God bless to us this reading of his own word. I'd like to read from James chapter 2, verses 14 to 26.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, he's writing to us about the difference between what we might describe as a living faith and a dead faith, a genuine faith or a counterfeit faith.

And we read in 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. 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.

[2 : 41] 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?

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead. Amen. May God bless to us this reading from his word.

[3 : 46] As we now turn to James chapter two from verse 14, we see that James the apostle is teaching us a very important lesson.

He's teaching us a lesson about faith and a lesson about life and how those two truths come together. What we believe, how we live. Now, this passage has caused a degree of controversy over the years.

As famous a voice as Martin Luther once regarded James's letter as a letter of straw, that he felt it wasn't weighty, wasn't substantial, and therefore should not be held on the same level as the letters of Paul, for example, letter to the Romans or Ephesians.

However, the Bible is the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. The Bible has one big story. It has a beginning.

It has a middle. It has an end. The Bible tells us how everything started. The Bible tells us how everything finished, will finish. The Bible tells us how things went wrong, and the Bible tells us how God will put all things right.

[5 : 01] Now, if within the Bible there were two different views about faith, two different views about life, two different views about the gospel, two different views about the terms or conditions of that gospel, that'd be quite problematic, wouldn't it?

You wouldn't know who to trust. Do I read James, for example, or do I read Paul? Which one is right? Which one is wrong?

Well, you might not be surprised if I say to you that I believe that the Bible is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and that there is no conflict or contradiction between James and Paul or James and Paul and for that matter, Jesus, that the same message is being taught, whether it was by John the Baptist, whether by Jesus himself, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul, Philip, James, the Old Testament prophets, the same message comes through loud and clear.

So as we look to this portion of James's letter, I want to remind ourselves that the Bible is not divided. There was a famous speech just before the American Civil War by Abraham Lincoln.

This made him famous. It was called The House Divided Speech. He said this. He said, a house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.

[6 : 37] I do not expect the union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. Now, of course, Jesus is there picking up upon that language, house divided, that Lincoln was talking, picking up the language of Jesus.

Jesus spoke in Mark chapter 3, and he said, when he was accused of doing these miracles by the power of Beelzebub or by the power of the evil one, he said, how can Satan cast out Satan?

If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. So if the Bible was found to teach two different lessons or two different messages concerning how it is that we are to be saved or how it is that we are meant to live, that would create a divided message.

And just like a divided house cannot stand, a divided Bible couldn't stand, couldn't stand the test of time, couldn't stand the challenges that life brings.

But I do believe that the message of the Bible is not divided but unified. And I'd like with you to look at this portion of James' letter to see what he's telling us about faith and the contrast that he makes between a faith that is dead and lifeless and a faith that is living and vibrant, a faith that is true and genuine versus a faith that is counterfeit and false.

[8 : 17] And what James does, I think, very helpfully is he gives us examples. He gives us illustrations. And that was a great gift of Jesus. And it's a great gift that we find throughout the Bible that the authors not just tell us what to believe but give us examples of what that looks like in practice.

So in James chapter 2 we have four examples, two positive and two negative. James begins by telling us of what a faith that is spoken looks like.

A faith that is said rather than a faith that is done. So if you look at verses 14 onwards, what good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith?

That's key. Someone says, I have faith. But does not have works. Can that faith save him? Is such a faith genuine?

Is it real? And the first example is 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 : 36] What good is it? Now James asks the question but the answer is obvious. The answer is it's no good. It doesn't help. It doesn't change the circumstance.

It doesn't make it better. So James is saying here's someone who says I have faith. And when he's encountered with someone with a problem or a need, again he speaks.

He says be well fed, be warm. So you see here's someone who says but doesn't do. One of the older commentators, Thomas Manton, a Puritan writer, he put it this way.

He said the stomach is not filled with words nor the back clothed with wishes. So here's an example of someone who says they have faith and who says be warm and well fed.

And James says is such a faith real? Is such a faith genuine? Is such a faith of any worth? Because those words don't make the hungry person full.

[10:42] those words don't make the naked or the cold person warm. The second illustration brings us to the subject of theology.

One of the subjects I teach is systematic theology. I also teach practical theology. And one of my colleagues put it very well when he said all theology needs to be practical and all of our practice needs to be theological.

meaning that what we believe needs to find expression and what we do needs to be rooted in what we believe. So now we come to the second scene and we have a theology here and the unlikely scene is among the demons because we move from the person who says be warm and well fed.

We then move on and James says also faith by itself if it does not have works is dead 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. So here's a theology. Here's a theology of the demons.

[12:00] They have a knowledge of God. It's not a saving knowledge. It's not a knowledge based on faith but it's a knowledge that produces terror. They shudder.

So you see faith is not just knowledge. Faith is not just giving a series of yes responses to a series of propositions.

Faith is rooted in a person. Faith is rooted in Jesus Christ. That is the key to our faith. D.L.

Moody a famous evangelist in the 19th century put it this way he said a rule I have had for years is to treat the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal friend.

He is not a creed a mere doctrine but it is he himself we have. And you see the Christian faith comes down to Jesus. The demons recognize Jesus.

[12:58] The demons understood what Jesus was about. The demons were frightened by Jesus. The demons know something about God and something about Jesus but they have no saving knowledge of course.

So James is saying here's two examples. Here's example one. The spoken faith that has no expression no practical outworking.

Here's the second example of those who have the knowledge of God but that knowledge only produces terror in their lives. So that's the negative. And then James quickly goes on to say let me give you two positive examples because you see it's a false dichotomy it's a false choice because we're not being told to choose okay you can choose work or you can choose faith choose one or the other.

Now of course you can't have one without the other. You can't do the work of God unless you believe in God but you can't believe in God and have nothing to do with his work nothing to do with his people.

Because James is focusing our attention both vertically our relationship to God but also horizontally our relationship with each other and both are essential to the Christian life.

[14:14] We respond to God and we respond to one another. Apostle Paul does this in Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians the first half of Ephesians 2 is our responsibility and our response to God what God has done for us in Jesus and then second half of Ephesians 2 is our vertical responsibility or vertical relationship that we now have a relationship with all of God's people from all different backgrounds because of what Jesus has done for us.

So the second two illustrations that James gives us remember the faith of the demons or the theology of the demons causes them to shudder now he introduces us or reintroduces us to Abraham the father the faithful and what he does is he reminds us that Abraham's faith was based on obedience that he obeyed God so you see the demons have a knowledge of God that produces terror they shudder Abraham has a knowledge of God but that produces trust faith and obedience we read in James chapter 2 was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar you see that faith was acting 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 a friend of God Abraham had a relationship with God he had faith he had trust he had obedience God summons him he responds God commands him he obeys and as he responds God credits his faith to him as righteousness the same terms the same conditions you see you and I respond to the gospel we respond to Jesus and God credits to us righteousness it's a righteousness that is not our own but a righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus Christ it's his righteousness credited to us so James goes on to say example two example two is Abraham Abraham has a knowledge of God and that knowledge finds an expression it finds action it finds activity it does work it obeys

God even when God calls upon Abraham to make the greatest of all sacrifices sacrificing his son Isaac Abraham believes Abraham trusts and therefore Abraham obeys very different picture isn't it from the person that just says they have faith and a person who just says be warm and well fed very different picture from the demons who know about God but don't know God they have no relationship with God but Abraham does Abraham responds Abraham obeys and Abraham is commended he's commended as the father of the faithful and he's commended for his life of faith which is characterized by action by work and it's interesting that James quotes the same portion of Genesis here Genesis 15 and verse 6 as the apostle Paul does in Romans chapter 4 Abraham believed

God and it was credited to him as righteousness both authors choose the same verse but they use that verse to describe different aspects of Abraham's life and different aspects of Abraham's testimony and you see it's obvious isn't it that Paul and James are using this word justify in a different way that shouldn't surprise us that shouldn't concern us for example the apostle John tells us that the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us that's John chapter 1 verse 14 and therefore he uses this word flesh meaning to be human Jesus became a human being but now Paul uses the same word flesh but he uses that word flesh to describe our human struggles the struggles against our human flesh our sinful human desires the three enemies that we have the world the flesh and the devil so the same word has two different meanings or two different uses depending upon the author so we believe that all scripture is God breathed but we also believe that there are differences in terms of different authors may use different words or different themes they have different styles different personalities so that's why you read

[19:20] John's gospel and John is different from Matthew that's why you read the letter to the Romans and the letter to the Romans is different than John's first letter or James or the letter to the Hebrews Isaiah is different from Ezekiel different characters different personalities but the same authority is with the whole of scripture all scripture comes from God all scripture is for our benefit and we respond accordingly so Paul is telling us that works cannot save they were never intended to save James is telling us that works must accomplish or must accompany the life of faith that they cannot be separate from faith so when Paul says that we are justified by faith that's true and when James says that justification involves not just our faith but what we do as well they're saying comparable and complementary truths using the same words so as we read of the

Abraham story James identifies the work that Abraham does his obedience and his faith which leads to action and then he also uses a final and fourth illustration so if he chooses Abraham the father of the faithful that's an obvious illustration but he chooses a less than obvious illustration from the Old Testament Rahab you see Rahab was a Canaanite woman she was a prostitute she lived in Jericho but Rahab had a genuine faith she had a knowledge of God and a trust in God and what did that faith lead her to do well James tells us that she received the messengers and sent them out by another way she had a relationship with the living and the true God based upon who God is and based upon what God did because if you read in Joshua chapter 2 and that's from verses 8 down to verse 11 some of the background of the Rahab story is given to us there that they had heard about what God did in Egypt that they had heard about

God's actions and God's doings and as soon as we heard it we're told our hearts melted and there was no spirit left in any man because of you for the Lord your God he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath so Rahab had a knowledge of God and that knowledge was based on faith that she knew that the God of Israel was the true God and that her heart melted and that she gave the messengers security and safety and then sent them on their way in safety so you see the illustrations are very different instead of saying be warm and well fed instead of Rahab saying to the messengers I wish you well she helped them she gave them a safe place to stay she warned them she set them on their way a different direction and when it came time and she was questioned she

lied and she protected them at great personal threat so you see here's two examples that James gives us genuine faith of living faith of faith that is accompanied by action and he's asking his audience and he's asking you and me who do you identify with you see it's not enough to have knowledge about

God it's not enough to even agree with that knowledge but James is saying that the faithful are demonstrating their faith in action that their lives become testimonies to a living faith in a living God through the living risen Lord Jesus Christ you see our faith is not a dead faith our faith is not just an intellectual faith but our faith is rooted in our heart and our faith is lived out in our lives you see Abraham trusted God he exercised faith now there's a great illustration from the life of one of the famous missionaries in the 19th century John G.

Payton John G. Payton was a missionary in the South Pacific in the New Hebrides and he was trying to translate the Bible the New Testament into the local language but he found that he couldn't find a word for faith until one day one day he saw a South Sea Islander exhausted after a long day of work and the Islander collapsed and fell asleep into a hammock and he said to one of his colleagues a local Islander what just happened there describe what that man just did that he fell into the hammock that he placed his whole weight on that hammock and the man gave him a word for what just happened and Payton said that's it that's what faith is faith is resting yourself fully and completely on God and such a faith is the only faith that can ever see we don't rest upon ourselves we don't trust in what we've done we don't trust in what anything about ourselves quite the opposite we trust wholly and completely on the work of another

[25 : 08] Jesus Christ that's the gospel but James is distinguishing real faith from false faith genuine faith from counterfeit faith living faith from a dead faith it's not possible to have faith without works even Martin Luther himself that great rediscoverer of the doctrine of justification by faith alone Luther said this he said we are justified by faith alone but faith that is alone is not faith genuine faith biblical faith faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is always accompanied by action even the thief on the cross even a man who was coming to the very end of his life he comes to trust in Jesus remember Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom and we're told that Jesus said to him today you will be with me in paradise but even that man was demonstrating the reality of his faith what did he say to his compatriot his fellow thief said don't you fear God you know we're getting what our sins deserve but this man has done nothing wrong basically he's saying to his fellow criminal you know don't make your situation even worse don't add insult to injury you're guilty

I'm guilty we're getting our just punishment but this man is innocent and then he turns to Jesus remember me Lord when you come into your kingdom so even there he's demonstrating the reality of his faith it's genuine it's true so as we turn to James chapter two James is challenging us is our faith only seen or heard in our words we say we have faith or is our faith lived out in our lives is it demonstrated by what we do by how we live by how we treat other people particularly how we treat those who are in need how we treat our brothers and sisters in Jesus because a real and living faith finds expression Rahab gave safety and security to the spies the person at the beginning of the passage who simply wished his hungry and his poorly clothed brother well and warm that's a very different picture isn't it the demons who have a knowledge of God and Abraham who had a faith in God very different picture very different outcomes so

James chapter two is describing to us what the gospel looks like in practice we are justified by faith but that faith is accompanied by action by work by a life that's consecrated to God by a life that's consecrated and dedicated to his church and his people but you see this is the same message that we read about just a moment or two ago in Ephesians chapter two because the apostle Paul makes it quite clear he says for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it is the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them good works prepared by God prepared for us that we walk in them that we live a life of faith and a life of faith lived out in action in work so

Paul says you can't separate faith and life James says you can't separate faith and life you can't separate faith and works there's not the category of Christians who have faith the other category of Christians who have works no there's only one category of Christians those who have faith and those whose faith is demonstrated in the reality of their life their words their actions their work their good deeds their kindness their love their compassion their concern their care in one sense talk is cheap you can say anything I was just reading essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer Dietrich Bonhoeffer a

powerful testimony a powerful witness in Nazi Germany he stood up for the truth but it was a costly stand cost in his life and he often contrasts these truths he said there is cheap grace and cheap grace costs nothing and there's a costly grace and that costly grace can cost everything but the question is what is genuine and what is true the apostle

James tells us that faith and works cannot be separated they are inextricably linked so too as Paul James wants his audience to realize that their lives are testimonies but they are testimonies of one or two things they are testimonies of a genuine real faith that commends the gospel or they are hollow expressions of an empty of a vain or of a dead faith that commends neither the gospel nor the Lord Jesus it's simply words but words accompanied with actions are powerful words accompanied with actions are persuasive and words accompanied by works demonstrate the reality of a changed life of a new life of the power of the gospel which is the power of God and salvation for all who believe that's our good news that's the gospel you see

[31 : 16] James has the same gospel Paul has the same gospel Jesus proclaims the same gospel we see it from Old Testament to New Testament from gospels to letters from Paul to Peter to James to John wherever you look you see the one message of salvation wherever you look you see the one savior of men and women of boys and girls and with this let me close there's a great quotation well I'll close with two one is a scene from D.L. Moody's ministry now Moody was roundly criticized he was criticized for the way he did evangelism he was criticized for his preaching and criticized for his teaching he was criticized for his pronunciation he was not a well educated man but for a man who was only educated to the age of 10 he ended up preaching the gospel to 100 million people in person he's credited with leading 70,000 people to faith individually but one day he was speaking to a group of church workers and afterwards a woman came up to him very angry and said

Mr. Moody do you mean to tell me that I an educated woman taught from childhood in good ways and all my life interested in the church and doing good must enter heaven the same way as the worst criminal of our day no madam said Moody I don't God does he says everyone who would enter heaven no matter how good they think they are or how well educated or zealous in good works must be born again there are no alternatives there are no other options Jesus says you must be born again you must have a new and a living birth through faith in Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit comes to take take up dwelling place in your heart and when the Holy Spirit enters you now live this new vibrant life John Wesley described these two great truths of the gospel the work of Christ on the cross what God does for us the work of the Holy Spirit what God does in us the work that God does in us and finally

I want to leave you with a quotation from John Calvin Calvin was asked to write a preface to a French edition of the New Testament and in that preface he described the essential nature of the gospel he said that we do not know what God has commanded or forbidden us we cannot tell good from evil light from darkness the commandments of God from the ordinances of men without the gospel everything is useless in vain without the gospel we are not Christians without the gospel all riches is poverty all wisdom folly before God strength is weakness and all the justice of man is under the condemnation of God but by the knowledge of the gospel we are made children of God brothers of Jesus Christ fellow townsmen with the saints citizens of the kingdom of heaven heirs of God with Jesus Christ by whom the poor are made rich the weak strong the fools wise the sinners justified the desolate comforted the doubting shore and slaves free the gospel is the word of life and truth it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe and the key to the knowledge of God which opens the door for the kingdom of heaven to the faithful by releasing them from sins and closes it to the unbelievers binding them in their sins blessed are all they who hear the gospel and keep it for in this way they show that they are children of God so blessed are you who keep the gospel who believe the gospel blessed are you who trust in the Lord

Jesus Christ and blessed are you who express your faith in action in words in deeds in good works because these are the works that God has prepared for you to demonstrate the reality and the living faith that you have in our living God and in our living and risen Savior his Son Jesus Christ may God bless his word to you Amen Amen Amen time to ■■■■■■■■ Amen