

Is Your Faith Alive and Well?

James 2:14-26

An Expository Sermon

by David Roper

Do you like controversy? Do you thrive on contention? Or rather do you break out in hives when there is disagreement? If you do, you may want to rub on a generous amount of your favorite ointment before we begin our study of James 2:14-26.

This probably is the section of James that caused Luther to call the book an epistle of straw. This is the section of the book that elicits the strongest strugglings among denominational commentators. (One of my favorite writers on James ignores these verses altogether.)

But why all this consternation? In this passage, James says that faith without works is *useless*, faith without works *cannot be demonstrated*, faith without works *cannot change a person*, faith without works is *not perfected*, and faith without works is *dead!* And this simply will not do, not if you have already decided from isolated passages from the pen of Paul that works, *any* kind of works, have nothing whatever to do with our salvation!

But lest you become discouraged about our present study, let me quickly suggest two things. First, as long as one comes to this section without preconceived ideas, there is nothing hard to be understood in James 2:14-16. James says nothing here that he does not say everywhere in the epistle. Second, nothing in James contradicts Paul. Paul did stress in Romans (and elsewhere) that we are not saved *on the basis* of our works (Romans 4:1-5), but he never discounted the necessity of *obedience*. For instance, in his introduction to Romans, he noted that he had been “called to be an apostle” to bring about “*obedience of faith among all the nations*” (Romans 1:1, 5; italics mine). In the concluding lines of the same book he spoke of “the commandment of the eternal God, [which] is made known unto all the nations *unto obedience of faith*” (Romans 16:26; italics mine). On the other hand, James constantly stresses the importance of faith, but he wants us to know that the faith that saves is the

faith that *obeys*.

Maybe, just maybe, in their writings James and Paul are correcting *abuses* of the preaching or writings of the other. Some people *did* misapply some of the teachings of Paul (see Romans 6), so maybe James writes against the *misuse* of Paul’s teachings or vice versa.

But at any rate there is no disagreement between Paul and James. *Both* believed in the importance of faith *and* works. If further confirmation is needed, just check the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15, where Paul and James affirmed their agreement on the subject.

It will, therefore, be my purpose in this presentation, to emphasize both faith *and* works, to show the necessity of *both*. Years ago, there was an old gentleman whose job was to row people across a river at a spot where there was no other way to cross. This elderly man was very religious and loved to preach in his own way. The way he did it was unique. He called one of his oars “Faith” and the other he called “Works.” When someone got in his boat, he would first pull on the “Faith” oar and the boat would go in circles. “Faith only ain’t enough,” he would announce. Then he would pull on the “Works” oar and the boat would go in circles in the opposite direction. “Works only ain’t enough,” he would say. Then he would pull on both oars at once and the boat would go straight to the other side. “It takes *both* faith and works!” the evangelistic boatman would triumphantly conclude. And that is the message of *this* presentation.

I will be asking these questions: “Is *your* faith alive and well?” and “Is *my* faith alive and well?” We will be noting that in this section, James establishes some *general* principles concerning faith—*any* faith, whether before or after baptism. I will, therefore, use the occasion to encourage any who are not yet Christians to show their faith by repentance, confession, and baptism.¹ *But* I hope we will keep in mind that James is writing to *Christians* and that the main thrust of

his argument is to those who have already been baptized. Let each of us as Christians then first make application, not to denominational error, but to *self*. I ask again: "What about *our* faith? Is it alive and well?"

I. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS USELESS (2:14-17).

James has just finished teaching about showing partiality (2:1-13). As he closed that topic, he brought in the matter of *failing to show mercy* (v. 13). It is with this background, that he now asks the question: "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can that faith save him?" (James 2:14).

Profit means "to have value." The first part of James' question is this: "Of what *value* is it to say one has faith if one does not work, does not obey? The New English Bible has, "What *use* is it?" The understood answer is *none*. Faith without works is *useless*.

We might notice that James does not deny that this man has faith (in fact, James refers to his faith in the last part of the question). The trouble was that the man's faith was expressed only in talking. He *said* he had faith. Not too long ago I visited with a man who had been paralyzed for many years. He had to live in an iron lung. But the paralysis of the man's limbs had not affected his tongue. We enjoyed a good visit with each other. That was a tragic situation. But it was not nearly as tragic as the one in which a person's limbs have become inoperative *spiritually* so that he never uses them to help others, but whose *tongue* has not been affected. He knows the *vocabulary* of faith, but not the *vocation* of faith. He *talks* it but he doesn't *walk* it. He is long on *profession* but short on *practice*. This type of faith, says James, is *useless*.

Some may want to quibble about that word *saved*. The word *saved* can refer to being saved from past sins at the point of baptism (Mark 16:16) or being saved eternally (Matthew 24:13).² Since James is writing to Christians, I would assume that the second type of salvation is primarily in view. *But what difference does it make?* There are only two classes of people now, and there will only be two classes of people in the judgment—the saved and the lost! James says here that *works* has to do with *going to heaven*. If you want to go to heaven, don't just say "Lord,

Lord," but *do* the will of God in heaven (Matthew 7:21). James establishes a *general* principle applicable to *all*.

James now gives an *illustration* of *talking* but not *doing*. He says, "If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not those things needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead in itself" (James 2:15-17).

Let us get the picture. Here is a brother or sister in Christ,³ one with whom the other man shares the very closest of relationships. This one is "naked." He is not without clothing, but is with totally inadequate clothing (John 21:7; Matthew 25:36; Acts 19:16; etc.). And he is "in lack of daily food." He is desperately *hungry*. He was hungry yesterday, he is hungry today, and he will be hungrier tomorrow. He is not a professional bum. He is one who is genuinely and desperately in need. He lacks those things "*needful* to the body," the most elementary needs, the very necessities of life, not luxuries. And it is *obvious* that he is in need. His need *shows*. I can see him standing in his rags with the cold winds whistling about him and the snowflakes beginning to swirl about his emaciated body. His face is gaunt and drawn, and his skin has the dry, scaly look of dehydration. Without help, he cannot last long upon this earth.

And what is the response? It is "Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled!"

"Go in peace" was the standard Jewish farewell (1 Samuel 1:17; 20:42; Luke 7:50; 8:48; Acts 16:36). It was roughly equivalent to our cheery "Have a good day!" "Be ye warmed and filled" just meant "I surely hope your needs are taken care of." *But the man did nothing to take care of those needs*. He didn't share what he had; he didn't pull out his wallet; he didn't say, "You can use my credit card"; he didn't even get him in touch with the deacon in charge of benevolence! He just sent him off with *words*—cold, empty, useless, meaningless words. What did this profit? *Nothing*. You can't wrap words around a shivering body. There are no calories in words. Words without works are worthless, useless! To quote another, John said: "Whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? My little children,

let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:17, 18).

So James concludes this point by saying: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead *in itself*" (v. 17). It is the faith of the chief priests who believed, but would not confess Christ (John 12:42). It is the faith of the alien sinner who believes, but will not be baptized (Mark 16:16). It is the faith of the impotent Christian who believes but who does not love God or man (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). This kind of faith, says James, is a lifeless corpse—dead and useless!

II. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS CANNOT BE DEMONSTRATED (2:18).

With James hitting so close to home, one might expect objections. He apparently anticipates one in verse 18: "Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith."

James' point is easy to grasp, but exactly why he phrased the first part of the verse as he did has puzzled the experts.⁴ *Maybe* James is anticipating someone arguing, "So and so is a great man of faith, while I put the emphasis on works. *Each* is important, so stop harassing my friend, whose emphasis is faith."

Whatever the objection being made, James' answer is clear. There is no way for a man to show or prove or demonstrate his faith except by *doing* something. He says, "Show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith."

We understand this in other areas of life. What if a desperate criminal pointed a gun at me and said, "Put up your hands or I'll shoot"? How would I show that I believed him? I would do so by putting up my hands! What if the doctor said, "Take this medicine and you'll get well"? How could I show the I believe him? I would do so by taking the medicine!

James is stressing that this is just as true in the spiritual realm as it is in life in general. Jesus said, "He that believeth *and* is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16; italics mine). How can I show that I believe Him? I can by believing and being baptized! Jesus further commands us to teach sinners and make disciples, and if we will do this, He will be with us (Matthew 28:18-20). How can we show that we believe Him? We can

by teaching and making disciples!

As far as the world in general is concerned, there is no difference between an *atheist* and a *believer* until that believer starts *acting* as if he believes, that is, until his faith makes a difference in his *life*.

Faith without works cannot be *demonstrated*.

III. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS CANNOT CHANGE A PERSON (2:19, 20).

A large percentage of James' readers must have felt that just holding faith in their hearts was sufficient and were, therefore, haphazard about obedience. Perhaps this was because of their Jewish ancestry.⁵ This Jewish background seems to be in James' mind as he starts his next point: "Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: . . ." (James 2:19).

The Jews prided themselves on their monotheism, their belief in *one God*. The *Shema*, the classic statement that "Jehovah our God is one Jehovah" (Deuteronomy 6:4), was echoed by every faithful Jew morning and evening and continually in the temple. The rabbis taught the people that if they prolonged the word *one* in the recitation, their days would be prolonged on the earth.⁶

James does not hesitate to commend them on their belief in one God: "Thou doest well."⁷ Some have taught that James downgrades faith in his letter, but this is not true. Throughout the epistle, the importance of faith is stressed: "The proving of your *faith* worketh patience" (1:3); "Let him ask *in faith*, nothing doubting" (1:6); "Hold not the *faith* of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . with respect of persons" (2:1); "The prayer of *faith* shall save him that is sick" (5:15). (Italics mine.)

What James does downgrade is the faith that was an end within itself. Apparently, some of his readers thought that just believing in one God made them very special people—just as some members think that believing in one church or the necessity of baptism in and of itself makes them special.

James quickly lets his readers know that faith did not make them unique: "The *demons* also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19; italics mine).

These demons⁸—the devil's underlings and co-workers—James says "believe and shudder."

Such a statement must be startling to those who believe demons did not exist in the New

Testament times, that they were the figments of the imagination of an unenlightened and superstitious people, and that they can be explained as physical and mental disorders. Figments of the imagination do not believe and shudder.

But it may also be startling to those who believe in Satan and his coworkers to learn that demons “believe and shudder.” James and other inspired writers tell us about the faith of demons. They believe in the one God (James 2:19). They believe in the deity of Jesus (Mark 3:11, 12). They believe in the existence of a place of punishment (Luke 8:30, 31). They believe in Christ as Judge (Mark 5:1-13).

Believing all this, it is little wonder that they *shudder*. The root of the Greek word translated “shudder” or “tremble” (KJV) is “to bristle” or to have one’s hair stand on end (see Job 4:14). These demons know what is ahead and it *terrifies* them!

In this respect, they are far ahead of many of those to whom I preach. I can preach on eternity, and people check their watches. I can preach on heaven, and people plan what they are going to have for supper. I can preach on hell and get a yawn. But the demons know what is coming and they *tremble*. That should tell us something!

But that is as far as it goes with demons. There is a lot I don’t know about demons—exactly who or what they are, where they come from, etc. But *this* I know, even after they believe and tremble, *they remain demons*, still Satan’s henchmen, not angels serving God! Faith with works will not, cannot, change a person!

So again, James hammers home his point: “But wilt thou know, O vain man [literally, empty-headed man⁹], that faith apart from works is barren?”¹⁰ (James 2:20).

One writer suggests that there are three types of faith in James 2:14-26, each one of which can be described with a word starting with “d.” There is *dead* faith of verses 17, 20, and 26. This faith apparently involves only *the intellect*. Then there is *demonic* faith of verse 19. This faith goes further. It involves the intellect *and the emotions*. The demons are moved emotionally—they tremble. But involving the intellect and the emotions is still not enough. There must be the involvement of the whole man. And this includes not only the intellect and the emotions, but also *the will*, that which causes one to *act*. The writer

calls this *dynamic* faith.¹¹

IV. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS NOT PERFECTED (2:21-25).

No individual would be more respected by James’ Jewish Christian readers than “Father Abraham.” James calls upon the life of Abraham for proof of his thesis that faith must work in order to please God by saying:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Thou seest faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect; and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God. Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith (James 2:21-24).

Every little Jewish boy and girl knew by heart the story of Abraham offering Isaac (Genesis 22:11-19).

To test Abraham, God came to him and told him to take his son, his only son of promise, Isaac, into the land of Moriah and there offer him as a burnt offering. Early the next day Abraham, Isaac, and two young male servants started on the journey. On the third day they reached the designated spot, a mountain. The two servants were left behind while Abraham and Isaac climbed the mountain. They took with them the wood, the fire, and the knife for the burnt offering. As they toiled upward, Isaac asked, “My father: . . . Behold, the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7). Abraham’s heart must have been breaking, but he replied, “God will provide . . . my son” (Genesis 22:8).

At last they reached the summit. Abraham built the altar, put on the wood, and then bound Isaac and laid him on the altar. I cannot imagine the feelings of father and son as this was done nor what words might have passed between them. Abraham then took the knife to slay his son. There was no hesitation. In his heart he had already done the deed (Hebrews 11:17). But a Voice from heaven stopped him, saying, “Now I *know* that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me” (Genesis 22:12, italics mine). Abraham was allowed to substitute a ram, caught in a nearby thicket, for his son. Then the voice came again, repeating the

great covenant promise first made in Genesis 17:1-3. It concluded: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; *because thou hast obeyed my voice*" (Genesis 22:18; italics mine).

This is one of the most touching stories in the Bible demonstrating the faith of both Abraham and Isaac. How was Abraham able to meet such a test? He had *faith*, the kind of faith that *did what God said* even though he did not fully understand. Someone has said that faith is *not* believing in spite of the evidence, but rather obeying in spite of the consequences! The Hebrew writer spoke of Abraham's active, *working* faith in Hebrews 11:17-19: "By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; . . ."

Abraham did not just say the words, "Jehovah our God is one Jehovah," and think that was sufficient. Rather, he *did* what God told him to do.

This seems a nice, straightforward illustration, establishing the point that the only viable faith is the faith that obeys, does, and works. But, believe it or not, this simple illustration is at the center of the controversy I mentioned at the start of this lesson. I am sure James would be astonished if he could hear the objections his illustration prompts.

The word *justified* disturbs many. Someone says, "Was not Abraham our father *justified* by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?" "Justified *by works*?" another says. Some can't have that! So someone says, "This means that he was justified *in the eyes of men* when he offered Isaac." But this position has several problems. First, the passage says he was justified *when* he offered Isaac. And no one else was present on that occasion except Abraham, Isaac, and *God*. Second, in the context, "justified" is used synonymously with being "saved" (v. 14) and being counted righteous *by God* (v. 23).

So another says, "The justification referred to here is not the initial justification of one becoming a child of God, but rather *ultimate* justification." Again some comments are in order. First, Paul quotes the same passage that James quotes (Genesis 15:6) and *does* apply it to initial justification (Romans 4:1-4). Second, what difference

does it make anyway? What if it were shown that James is just anticipating ultimate justification? Or that Paul was referring back? *In either case, justification has to do with going to heaven.*

But that prompts someone to say, "It *can't* have to do with going to heaven! You just mentioned Paul in Romans 4. And in that passage Paul gives a different illustration of Abraham's faith. And in verse 2 he says, in effect, that Abraham was *not* justified by works!" So we ultimately come to the old Paul-versus-James idea. (Incidentally, I may be a little slow, but I have never figured out why in the so-called Paul-versus-James controversy, what Paul supposedly says always takes precedent over what James says!)

But, as already noted in the introduction of this lesson, the fact is that Paul and James do *not* contradict each other. Rather, their statements are complementary, supplementary. In context, Paul is talking about works of merit, such as those under the Law of Moses, whereby a person is trying to *earn* his salvation by a good life, by helping others, or other good deeds. On the other hand, James is talking about works that emulate from a heart that simply wants to *do* what God says, with no thought of earning or meriting anything.

Let me insert this startling thought into this controversy: Since James is an *inspired* writer, speaking for *God*, why not leave his writings alone? Don't try to bend or twist them to fit some predetermined doctrine. Just let James speak for himself—and thus for *God*!

And what *does* he say? Let us look briefly at the text.

Verse 21 says Abraham was *justified* by works, when he offered Isaac. He was justified (or counted as righteous in verse 23) *by God when* he obeyed.

Verse 22a says, ". . . faith wrought with his works, . . ." "Wrought with" means literally, worked with or *cooperated* with. Faith and works *cooperated*. James doesn't teach "faith only." James doesn't teach "works only," James teaches faith *and* works.

Verse 22b says, ". . . by works was faith made perfect [or completed or finished]," Our faith *needs* to be perfected, and this is the purpose of works. Hence, the heading for this section is "Faith Without Works Is Not Perfected."

Verse 23a says, "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; . . ." The word translated "reckoned" is translated "counted" in other translations. It means *to credit to someone's account that which does not actually belong to him*. Abraham was not actually righteous, just, perfect in every respect. But God *counted* Abraham righteous or put it on the ledger that he was righteous when Abraham believed.

When did all this take place? The Scripture referred to in verse 23 is Genesis 15:6. At the time referred to in that passage, Abraham had no children and he was growing old. But God told him that his children would be as numberless as the stars. We then read in Genesis 15:6: "And he *believed* in Jehovah; and he [God] reckoned it to him for righteousness." (Italics mine.) But this event took place several years before Abraham offered Isaac. How do they tie together? James is evidently saying that *the point at which* Abraham's faith was "counted for righteousness" was after that faith had been tested and had met the test. Remember that it was *after* Abraham's obedience that God said, "Now I *know* that thou fearest God," (Genesis 22:12) and again, ". . . because thou hast *obeyed* my voice" (Genesis 22:18).

Verse 23b says, ". . . and he was called the friend of God." This appellation was called on Abraham long after his death (Isaiah 41:8; 2 Chronicles 20:7). Why was Abraham "God's friend"? *He did what God said!*

Men may find these verses controversial, but it is obvious that James thinks this is a nice, clear illustration. Notice the way he starts off the very next verse: "Ye *see* . . ." (v. 24). James expected them (and us) to *see* the point. He has proved his point by analogy (vv. 14, 15), by demonstration (vv. 17, 18), and by inspired affirmation (vv. 14-23). There can be only one conclusion: "*Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith*" (James 2:24; italics mine).

Some translations put the word *only* at the last of the verse: ". . . not by faith *only*." In the original the word *only* is there for emphasis, and that is a good place to leave it: ". . . *not by faith only*."

I do not know how James could have been any clearer. Imagine this conversation:

"James, are you teaching that one must do

some *works* in order to be justified?"

"That's what I said."

"Are you teaching justification by works *only*?"

"No, no, no. Can't you read? I said, 'By works and not by faith *only*.' I have plainly said that justification is by faith (but not faith *only*) *and* works. So it couldn't be by works *only*. My friend, Paul, summarized it well when he spoke of 'faith working by love' in his letter to the brethren in Galatia [Galatians 5:6]."

"Well, are you maybe saying that faith results in one kind of justification and works result in another kind of justification?"

"Can't you read? It says, 'Justified by works and not by faith *only*.' The first part of the verse says we are justified by works. The last part of the sentence stresses that we are justified by faith (but *not* faith *only*). Only *one* justification is spoken of in the verse. A justification on the basis of works *and* faith. If it is not the same justification for both, the sentence makes no sense."

"Is there *any* possibility that we can be justified by faith *only*?"

At this point one can imagine James walking off, looking thoroughly disgusted and shaking his head as he says, "Read it; read it. *Not* by faith *only*, *not* by faith *only*, *not* by faith *only*."

The creed books of *men* may say, "That we are justified by faith *only* is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort," but the *Bible* does not say it. This is the only place in the Authorized Version that the phrase "by faith *only*" is found, and it is plainly stated, "*not* by faith *only*." Which are we to believe, man or God?

But James is not quite finished. Some might continue to cling to the fact that Abraham was a child of God *before* he offered Isaac, so (they conclude) James' statement has nothing to do with becoming a child of God. These need to listen to James' last illustration. He says, "And in like manner was not also *Rahab the harlot* justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way?" (James 2:25; italics mine).

The verse begins with "in like manner." The NIV has "in the same way." James is talking about the same kind of faith, the same kind of justification.

One would be hard pressed to think of a

greater contrast than that of Abraham and Rahab—one the father of the Jews, the other a Gentile; one godly, the other sinful; one the friend of God, the other of the enemies of God. But they had something in common. When they *believed*, their faith caused them to *act*.

Like the story of Abraham, the story of Rahab was a familiar one to the Jews. She was called by some Jews, “the first proselyte.” She is listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 (v. 31). She later married Salmon and was the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth. She was the great-grandmother of David the King and in the lineage of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5, 6). She was quite a woman!

Her story is found in Joshua 2 and 6. When Joshua sent two spies into Jericho to determine its strength, they found a most unexpected ally in Rahab, the harlot. She had heard how God had been with the Israelites, and she believed (Joshua 2:10, 11). At the risk of her own life, she bravely helped the spies to escape, using the well-known scarlet cord. As a result, when Jericho was destroyed, she and her family were spared, as they followed the exact instructions of those spies.

By no stretch of the imagination could Rahab be spoken of as a child of God before she was “justified by works.” The Hebrew word for *harlot* in the book of Joshua might be somewhat ambiguous, but the Greek word in the books of James and Hebrews is not. She was a prostitute, a pagan living by pagan standards. But she came to *believe* in the one true and living God, and that faith caused her to *cooperate* in the plan of God. Her faith *did* something. And as a result, she was spared, she was admitted to covenant relationship, and her entire life was changed!

Let me pause now to ask you a question: “Is there any comfort in this section of Scripture on Abraham and Rahab for those who would say, “Just believe on the Lord, say a little prayer, and be saved”! I think I can hear your answer: “None at all.” But now let me ask you some other questions: “*Is there any comfort in this passage for one who has been baptized, whose faith has ceased to work? For one who is not faithful in attendance? For one who is not trying to teach others? For one who is self-centered and not concerned about the needs of others? For one who is living like the world?*”

It is very tempting when studying this pas-

sage to center our attack on those in denominations who teach error. But let us never forget that James’ big guns are zeroed in on his *brethren*—brethren who said, “Be warm and filled,” but who didn’t show love; brethren who thought that believing a certain doctrine made them special whether they lived a godly life or not; brethren who thought that their spiritual ancestry made them unique whether they were personally committed or not.

The point of this passage and the point of this lesson is this: Let us examine *ourselves*—our hearts, *our* obedience.

V. IN SHORT, FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD (2:26).

If we were to try to determine James’ main point by the number of times it is repeated, it would be a tossup between the fact that we are “justified by works” (vv. 21, 24, 25) and the one that says “faith without works is dead” (vv. 17, 20, 26). James has just restated the former in verse 25. He now restates the latter: “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26).

Doctors and lawyers continue to struggle with the question, At what point does *death* occur? Is it when the heart stops beating? When the brain waves cease? When all bodily functions cease? James’ answer may have little meaning in a court of law or a medical textbook, but it is decisive: Death occurs when the immortal spirit, given to us by the Father of Spirits (Hebrews 12:9; Ecclesiastes 12:7), leaves this mortal body, a gift from our parents.

Probably the best, the shortest, and the most concise definition of *death* as used in the Bible is the word *separation*. The body separated from the spirit is dead.

James says this is so in the matter of faith: “Faith apart from works is dead.” Faith separated from works is lifeless! Many parallels might be drawn between a dead body and a dead faith: A dead body does not move; a dead faith does not move. A dead body is barren; a dead faith is barren. A dead body has no value; a dead faith has no real value. A dead body is repulsive to men; a dead faith is repulsive to God!

The Bible speaks of many different types of faith: great faith (Matthew 8:10), strong faith (Hebrews 11:11, 12), and perfect faith (James

2:22). But it also speaks of little faith (Matthew 6:30), weak faith (Matthew 17:20), and *dead faith* (James 2:26). Would any contend that one can be saved by a *dead* faith? Surely not! An alien sinner cannot be, *nor can an inactive member of the church!*

CONCLUSION

In our lesson we have seen that faith without works is useless. It cannot be demonstrated, it cannot change a person, it is not perfected, and it is dead! Our faith does not help us—or others—until it causes us to act.

Once a chaplain walked up to a wounded soldier who had been lying on the ground some time without anyone treating his wounds. The chaplain asked, “Would you like for me to read to you from the Bible?” “No!” came the angry reply. “Is there anything else I can do for you?” the chaplain asked. “I’m thirsty!” the soldier said. The chaplain gave him a drink from his own canteen. “Anything else?” he asked. “I’m cold!” came the reply. The chaplain took off his coat and spread it over the soldier. “Anything else?” he again asked. “My head is uncomfortable!” was his reply. The chaplain took off his cap and arranged it under the soldier’s head and then asked again, “Anything else?” The soldier looked up at him and tears came to his eyes as he said, “I think now I’d like for you to read to me from the Bible.”

May God help us to have the kind of faith that even the world can *see*.

As we come now to the invitation, please notice that in this passage James pictures four types of individuals—two with a dead faith and two with a living, active faith. On the one side is the individual who says, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” but does nothing to help. On the other is faithful Abraham, the friend of God, who did not hesitate to obey God, no matter the personal cost! On the one side are the demons who believe and tremble, but who remain demons. On the other is a pagan woman, who believed in God, who cast her lot with the people of God, who made a 180-degree turn in her life!

Each one of us here today is on one side or the other—on the side of the unloving and the demons or on the side of Abraham and Rahab; on the side of dead faith or the side of a living, active faith; on the side of damnation or on the side of

justification. Let each of us examine himself. Let each ask himself the question, “Is *my* faith alive and well?”

FOOTNOTES

¹If it is desired to slant the lesson more to non-Christians, a good illustration is in Loretta Lynn’s, *Loretta Lynn: Coal Miner’s Daughter* (Chicago: Regnery, 1976; Warner Books, 1977), p. 215.

²This can also refer to the day-to-day cleansing by the blood of Christ.

³This *could* just refer to a fellow *Jew*, whether in Christ or not, but I believe in the context it refers to a fellow Christian.

⁴One could expect an opponent to say, “You may have works but I have my faith.”

⁵See the first lesson where the basic argument is made for James’ readers being Jewish Christians.

⁶Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1972), p. 139.

⁷Some think there is a touch of irony in this, and there may be, but he apparently used the same phrase in James 2:8 without irony.

⁸The Greek word is *daimonia*. There is only one devil (*diabolos*) (James 4:7).

⁹Woods, p. 142.

¹⁰A comparison can be made to the unproductive plant or animal.

¹¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, (Wheaton, Ill.: SP Publications, Inc., 1978), pp. 76-80.

Visual-Aid Notes

Several illustrations in this lesson lend themselves to a chalkboard or overhead projector treatment. Without attempting to completely outline the lesson, I have listed some key points:

1. Title
2. Illustration of a man and a boat (Draw a simple boat as it might be seen from above. Draw one oar, adding an arrow to indicate the direction the boat would go. Erase that oar and draw the other oar, having the arrow point the other way. Finally, draw both oars, having the arrow point straight ahead.)
3. First main point
4. Stick-figure drawing with the words: “Be warmed and filled.”
5. Second main point
6. Stick-figure drawings: a robber with a gun and a man with his hands up; a medicine bottle
7. Third main point
8. A list of what demons believe
9. Fourth main point
10. Stick-figure drawings: Abraham offer-

- ing Isaac; Rahab helping the spies escape
11. Fifth main point
 12. A "bulls-eye" with the phrases "great faith," "strong faith," and "perfect faith" in the center and the following phrases on the circles going out from the center: "little faith," "weak faith," and (finally) "dead faith"
 13. Conclusion with stick-figure drawings: a sour-looking man and a demon on the left side which is labeled "DEAD FAITH" and Abraham and Rahab on the right side which is labeled "LIVING FAITH"
(Note: If you will look through Bible coloring books, you may find some good pictures of Abraham and Rahab. Coloring-book illustrations make excellent transparencies.)

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