

James 2 - Partiality in the Church; Useful Faith Manifests Itself in Works; Five Illustrations to Prove Believers are Justified (Before Man) By Works

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James 2

- (5) Faith does not show favoritism (2:1-13)
 - (A) Exhortation not to show favoritism (2:1)

1 My brothers *and sisters*, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

1 My brothers, do not let your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be tainted by favoritism.

1 My brethren, have ["hold"] not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

- "My brothers *and sisters*...your faith...our" - more evidence that James is writing to believers. James' audience doesn't need the gospel in order to be saved; they need instruction on how to live like what they already are.

— This is so important to understand in this epistle (and all of the Hebrew Christian epistles) because if you don't, you'll be completely confused by what James says in 2:12-13 and 2:14-26.

- "...do not hold your faith" - imperative mood; the faith we have in Christ should never be associated with personal favoritism. James is not questioning his readers' faith, he's saying that as you walk out your faith in service, don't do so with an attitude of personal favoritism.

— This command, and the commands throughout James, are not addressed to unbelievers because they have no possibility of doing them without the Holy Spirit

- "...glorious Lord Jesus Christ" - during His ministry Jesus never showed personal favoritism. In fact, He received criticism from the Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17). Their criticism came because they themselves were showing favoritism.

— It was Jesus' character to never show personal favoritism; this is why James, the half-brother of Jesus, as he gives believers a command to not show personal favoritism, instructs us to do this in the attitude of our "glorious" Lord Jesus Christ.

— Look at His example during His interaction with the woman at the well (John 4).

According to the culture of that time, she was the wrong gender (a woman), the wrong race (a Samaritan), and extremely morally corrupt. She was shocked that a Jewish man was even speaking with her (John 4:9). The disciples came back from grabbing food and were "amazed" that Jesus had been speaking with a woman (John 4:27).

— How could a believer in Christ even consider showing favoritism when Jesus died to atone for the sins of the entire world (1 John 2:2)?

- "...personal favoritism" - *prosōpolēmpsia*, partiality; showing favor to one person over another for no biblical reason. Favoritism among Christians is the manifestation of inconsistent love for other people.

— Definition of *prosōpolēmpsia*: the fault of one who when called on to requite or to give judgment has respect to the outward circumstances of men and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high-born, or powerful, to another who is destitute of such gifts.

— "Personal favoritism" or "partiality" implies an inclination to favor a person because of strong fondness or attachment. When we demonstrate favoritism for some over others, we do not love some people as we should.

— If we show favoritism in any form or fashion to a person based upon their outward appearance, monetary wealth, social status, race, or rank, James says that this behavior

does not mirror that of a believer in Christ.

— It really comes down to an inconsistency in Christian behavior. James highlights inconsistent behavior in his readers (believers) throughout this epistle:

- In James 1, it was the inconsistency of regarding some trials as good gifts from God, while at other times regarding them as bad gifts from God.
- In James 2, it is the inconsistent treatment of people, preferring some over others.
- In James 3, it is the inconsistent nature of our tongues (words)...at times we bless God with our words (praise/worship, etc.), then the same mouth is used to denigrate people.

— We need to understand that James wrote to an audience steeped in prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. During James' day, people were routinely and permanently categorized because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, or Greek or barbarian.

— This is one aspect of Jesus' work on the cross, to break down these "walls" that divided humanity, and to bring forth one new race of mankind in Him:

Eph 2:13-15:

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made **both groups into one** and **broke down the barrier of the dividing wall**,

15 by abolishing in His flesh the hostility, *which is the Law composed of commandments expressed* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two one new person, *in this way* establishing peace;

— The unity and openness of the early church was shocking to the ancient world, but it didn't come automatically. As this command from James shows, the apostles had to teach the early church about what Christ had done, and one of its significant effects, which was the elimination of manmade human distinctions.

Treating people with partiality may spring from preference, prejudice, or bias:

- Preference: implies a preconceived liking formed as a result of one's background, temperament, etc., that inclines them to a particular preference. We might say a certain person has a preference for murder mysteries.
- Prejudice: implies a preconceived and unreasonable judgment or opinion, usually an unfavorable one, marked by suspicion, fear, intolerance, or hatred. An example would be racial prejudice.
- Bias/Partiality/Favoritism: implies a mental leaning in favor of or against someone or something without passing judgment on the correctness or incorrectness of the preference. One might say someone has a bias toward the color blue.

(B) Concept applied to a church service (2:2-4)

2 For if a man comes into your **assembly** with a **goldring** and is **dressed in bright clothes**, and a **poor man** in **dirty clothes** also comes in,

2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

2 Suppose a man wearing gold rings and fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in.

2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

- In v2-4, James gives his readers what is likely a real-life example happening in the churches he was writing to, as reported to him, of a type of personal favoritism that had no place among believers...

- "...assembly" - *synagōgē*, synagogue or church (5:14); the use of this word rather than *ekklesia* shows that James wrote before Gentiles were widely received in the church.

Cornelius, the first Gentile member of the church, likely converted in 40 AD; Paul's first missionary journey was in 46-48 AD, and the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) occurred in 49 AD.

— The key is that both people, the rich man and the poor man, entered into the assembly. They came to church to worship God among a fellowship of believers, yet they are treated vastly different.

- "...gold ring...dressed in bright clothes" - a person who gives the outward appearance of having wealth and status

— James is not condemning the gold rings or the flashy clothing. He's condemning the church for their favorable reaction to it.

- "...poor man" - very poor, a beggar or homeless person

- "...dirty clothes" - not just poor, but dirty; offensive to the eyes

3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good *place*," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

3 If you give special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Please take this seat," but you say to the poor man, "Stand over there" or "Sit on the floor at my feet,"

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him,

- Remember in 1:26-27, where James used the example of widows and orphans to describe what "pure and undefiled religion" looks like in the life of a believer. He is saying the same thing here, but in a different context.

— The use of widows and orphans refers to people who have no ability to "pay you back" for doing something for them. They are completely helpless and unable to reciprocate for any good done to them.

— Now James uses a similar example between rich and poor. If you're making distinctions based on economic factors, you are exhibiting carnal behavior. You're more interested in how the rich person can help you in some way rather than a person who cannot help you in any way, but for whom Christ died for nonetheless.

— Our fallen sin nature makes it nearly impossible for us to not show some type of bias in favor or against others, based on looks, gender, nationality/race, appearance, social status, personality, those we differ with politically or theologically, or numerous other categories.

Why is favoritism contrary to God's character and purposes (2:4-13)?

1. We judge where God has not (v4)
2. God elects all (v5)
3. Rich oppressors (v6-7)
4. Favoritism violates God's Law (v8-11)
5. God will judge those showing favoritism (v12-13)

4 have you not made **distinctions among yourselves**, and **become judges** with **evil motives**?

4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

4 then you will have made false distinctions among yourselves and will have judged from evil motives, will you not?

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

- "...distinctions among yourselves" - when we show personal favoritism, we've created a distinction (or barrier) among persons that God Himself has not made

— When we show favoritism within the church, we re-erect the "barrier of the dividing wall" between one group and another (Eph 2:14) that God broke down with the advent of the Church Age

- "...become judges" - if I've put a barrier in the church that God never put there, then I make myself a judge. I'm a judge because I've decided something that God has not decided: God broke down the dividing wall, and by making distinctions, I'm putting it back up.

— God hasn't spoken to that issue (placed a barrier there), so I'm acting alone, outside of what God has decreed. I've divided where God has not.

- "...evil motives" - *ponēros*, the worldly distinctions that were made, and the personal favoritism that was shown, were "evil." There are three words for *evil* in Greek, *ponēros* is the worst type; it's the same Greek word used to describe "the evil one" in Matt 13:38.

— The evil motive of favoritism is the giving of preferential treatment to someone based upon what you perceive they can do for you, rather than what you can do for them. It means that their preferential treatment is being done out of selfish motives.

— Paul tells us what God thinks about behavior (in this case, personal favoritism) that stems from selfish ambition:

Rom 2:8-9a: but to those who are self-serving and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, *He will give wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of mankind who does evil,*

— It's easy to understand what James is saying...the problem is in recognizing it in our own lives and stomping it out. The human heart is so wicked that you could do the right thing with the wrong motive.

— We can fool a lot of people, but we can't fool God. Some day, at the Bema Seat judgment (2 Cor 5:10), God will disclose the motives of men's hearts (1 Cor 4:5).

1 Cor 4:5: Therefore do not go on passing judgment before *the* time, *but wait* until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *human* hearts; and then praise will come to each person from God.

- It's important to understand what James is saying and what he is not saying...

— James is not putting every person on equal footing or at a common level; there is no global equality of persons

— We must still allow proper respect for people to whom respect is due; James is not condemning preferential treatment. To honor an elderly woman to the detriment of a teenage boy is not forbidden, or even what James is talking about.

— Members of armed forces come to church...to clear out special seats in the front and show special recognition...not a problem

Favoritism vs Preference?

- Choosing friends is something we usually want to do ourselves, but James has a few warnings for us in this chapter
 - Be careful *why* you choose the friends you do, because choosing friends for the wrong reason is sin
- Favoritism is giving favorable treatment to a person strictly on the basis of outward appearance, wealth or social status, or what they can do for me

- Preference is giving proper respect for people to whom it is due: presidents, governments, authorities, veterans, etc.
 - James obviously saw this problem in the Jerusalem church at the time, which was under persecution and was very poor
 - James is not condemning the gold rings or the flashy clothing...he condemns believers for their favorable reaction to it

(C) God does not show favoritism in election (2:5)

5 Listen, my beloved brothers *and sisters*: did God not **choose** the **poor of this world** to **berich in faith** and **heirs of the kingdom** which He promised to those who love Him?

5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

5 Listen, my dear brothers! God has chosen the poor in the world to become rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who keep on loving him, has he not?

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

- After calling out his readers' "evil motives," James now gives them a better way to think...not the world's way of thinking but God's way of thinking.

- "...choose" - God chooses (elects) all who come to salvation, and that includes the poor. The point is that God doesn't show favoritism by whom He chooses to save (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:24-25); He elects people from across the spectrum.

— In fact, God elects more poor people than He does rich people (Cf. Luke 1:52-53; 1 Cor 1:26). That doesn't mean there is spiritual merit in poverty, it's just that God has chosen many of them on the basis of His grace.

- "...poor of this world" - James contrasts material poverty with spiritual wealth. The poor may be at a physical disadvantage to the rich, but they are not at a spiritual disadvantage.

- "...rich in faith" - the poor are chosen to be "rich in faith" because the poor simply have more opportunities to trust God. Thus, they may be "richer" in faith than a rich man. The rich *may* trust Him, the poor *must* trust Him.

- "...heirs of the kingdom" - an "heir" is someone who has a legal right to something, but they have not received it yet; they legally own it but do not yet possess it

— If we are already in the kingdom, why would James indicate that we are "heirs" of the kingdom? Legally, we have citizenship in the kingdom, we have an "entry ticket," but we are still heirs at this time because we have not entered it yet, nor are we enjoying it yet.

"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt 8:20).

- He had to borrow a coin to illustrate a truth.
- He borrowed a donkey to present Himself to Jerusalem.
- He borrowed a room to celebrate Passover.
- He died on a borrowed cross: it belonged to Barabbas, not Him.
- He was buried in a borrowed tomb—it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea (Is 53:1-3; Job 5:15; 36:15; Ps 9:18; 68:10; 69:33; 72:12-13; 102:17; Is 11:4).

(D) The rich oppress the poor (2:6-7)

6 But **you** have **dishonored** the poor man. Is it not the rich who **oppress** you and personally drag you into court?

6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

6 But you have humiliated the man who is poor. Are not rich people the ones who oppress you and drag you into court?

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

- "...you" - James' original audience

- "...dishonored" - describes someone who crouches in the presence of a superior. These judges' attitudes toward the poor man forces the poor man to crouch even further.

— This highlights the contrast between their attitude toward the poor (dishonor) and God's attitude toward the poor (choosing them to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, v5)

- "...oppress" - *katadynasteuō*, pictures a king exercising his authority over his subjects in a hurtful or oppressive manner. The rich were exercising their authority over Jewish believers in such a way as to hurt them. And James is saying, These are the people who oppress you, and you want to show favoritism toward them?

— The same Greek word for "oppressed" is also used in Acts 10:38, where it speaks of Satan's oppressive rule over his subjects: the way the rich were ruling over Jewish believers is the same way Satan rules over his.

- Interpreting this verse as evidence that God hates wealth or that rich people are bad is a distortion of Scripture. It's not a question of if a person has wealth, it's a question if your wealth has you; do you own possessions or do your possessions own you?

— Once your money becomes a god, then it's a problem (Matt 6:24; 1 Tim 6:10,17-18)

— James is not condemning wealth in this passage; quite the contrary. James is condemning the rich who got rich by oppressing others, by taking advantage or exploiting the poor in order to gain wealth.

— James 5:4 puts this verse in context: James is condemning wealthy oppressors who didn't pay their laborers. They got rich through slave labor, using people for labor then not paying them.

James 5:4: Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

1 Tim 6:17-18:

17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

18 *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

Prov 10:4: Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Ex 23:3: nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

7 Do they not blaspheme the good name by which you have been called?

7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

7 Are not they the ones who blaspheme the noble Name by which you have been called?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

- The people whom these believers are showing preference toward are the same people who are oppressing the poor in order to become rich (v6), and who by doing so are blaspheming Jesus Christ (v7).

(E) Favoritism violates the Law (2:8-11)

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the **royallaw** according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

8 Nevertheless, you are doing the right thing if you obey the royal Law in keeping with the Scripture, "You must love your neighbor as yourself."

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

- "If" - *ei*, first class condition; assumes the truth of the statement for the sake of argument
— James anticipated that some of his readers might defend their favoritism toward the rich by saying they are just loving the rich man as a neighbor, in obedience to the Law.

— But the problem James' readers had was not the fact that they loved the rich or that they treated the rich man well (which they should) but the fact they treated the poor man poorly. They were loving the rich, but not the poor.

- "...royal law" - while James' quoted from Lev 19:18, he's not quoting from the Law of Moses, but rather the "royal law" (the Law of Christ)

— In v12 (and 1:25), James references the "law of liberty." Why does James refer to the "royal law" and "law of liberty" when he's quoting the Mosaic Law? Because he's not quoting the Mosaic Law, but rather the Law of Christ or Law of the Spirit, which Church Age believers (his audience) are under, not the Mosaic Law.

- By quoting from Lev 19:18, James is telling his believing Jewish readers that when they show favoritism, they are violating God's law

— The Bible never promotes self-love, because we don't have a problem loving ourselves...we get enough sleep, we eat to be filled. We don't have any problem with self-love, we know how to get our way. These things come naturally to us.

— The problem comes in when we don't transfer the love we have for ourselves to someone else

— James' point is that when you show favoritism in the assembly, based on what they can or might do for you, you're not loving them as you love yourself, you're doing it out of self-love. And when you do this out of self-love, you're violating God's law.

— In Mark 12:28-31, Jesus declared this law to be the second most important commandment in the Mosaic Law

— James is not quoting Lev 19:18 to put Church Age believers back under the Law. For a description of this, see [James 09 Law and Grace \(James 2:6-9\)](#) and [James 10 Judging the Judges \(James 2:10-13\)](#).

9 But **if** you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the **Law** as violators.

9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors.

9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and will be convicted by the Law as violators.

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

- James now establishes what it means to not do well (Cf. v8c)

- "...if" - a first class condition ("since"), showing that this has become a deliberate practice

- "...Law" - the Mosaic Law, which contains the "royal law" (v8); those who practiced partiality were in violation of the Mosaic Law (Cf. Lev 19:18)

— While the Mosaic Law was no longer in effect, many of James' readers were convinced it was still in force for them (Acts 21:20). The full revelation on this issue had not yet been given when this epistle was written.

— To show partiality is to commit sin because it falls short of God's righteous standard

10 For whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one *point*, has become **guilty of all**.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

10 For whoever keeps the whole Law but fails in one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

- In case James' readers discounted the severity of the sin of showing favoritism, James essentially says that by doing so, they have broken the entire Law.

- There are 613 commandments in the Mosaic Law; if a person somehow succeeds in keeping 612 of them, but breaks one of them, he is viewed by God as being guilty of breaking all of them.

— James is guarding against selective obedience, those who pick and choose what commands of God should be obeyed and which can be safely ignored

- "...guilty of all" – not violated every command, but violated the unity of the law

— The Law is not a series of single requirements, but is a unified command that requires perfect love of God and our neighbors. The Hebrew word *Torah* (meaning "law") is always singular when applied to the Law of Moses, although it contains a total of 613 commands. Same is true for the Greek word *nomos* (law) in the NT.

— Some interpreters like to divide the Mosaic Law into ceremonial, legal, and moral commandments. On the basis of this division, many believe that the NT believer in Christ is free from the ceremonial and legal commandments, but not the moral commandments.

— James' point in this verse is that if a person shows partiality/favoritism to one over another, they have broken the command in Lev 19:18. And since they have broken a command, they have broken the entire Law because the Law of Moses is a singular unit.

— If someone breaks a legal commandment, he is guilty of breaking the ceremonial and moral laws as well. For example, if someone eats bacon, according to the Mosaic Law, he is guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments even though they say nothing about bacon. The Law is a unit and breaking one Law breaks them all.

— See **Mosaic Covenant > The Unity of the Law of Moses** in [8 Covenants of the Bible](#) for details about the unity of the Mosaic Law.

11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY;" also said, "DO NOT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do murder, you have become a violator of the Law.

11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

11 For the one who said, "Never commit adultery," also said, "Never murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you become a violator of the Law.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

- James is talking about the Law of Christ, not the Law of Moses. His point is that whatever legal system you're under, you cannot pick and choose what parts you want to obey. If you break any part of it, you're guilty of breaking all of it.

— Overall, James is saying that we stumble over the Law of Christ when we show favoritism to some but not others in the church. We are lawbreakers if we show favoritism in the Church.

- All 613 commands in the Mosaic Law were issued by the same God; all 613 commands are stamped with the same authority, and all equally express the will of the same Lawgiver.

— To violate even one of these commands is to resist the authority upon which all the commandments are founded

— This does not mean that a person has broken every Law, nor does it mean that every violation is equally serious. They are not, and for that reason, there were different types of punishment for different offenses.

— However, it does mean and does show that the Law is one grand unit; therefore, violating any commandment is an offense against the Lawgiver.

— To show favoritism toward some people over others is to incur the guilt of the whole Law

(F) God will judge favoritism (2:12-13)

12 So **speak**, and so **act**, as those who are to be judged by *thelaw of freedom*.

12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the law of liberty*.

12 You must make it your habit to speak and act like people who are going to be judged by the law of liberty.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

- The verbs in this verse ("speak" and "do") are commands in the present tense, emphasizing that habitual (continual) actions are required

- "...speak" - *laeō*, manifested in words; the verb is in the present tense, imperative mood meaning it's a continual (perpetual) command

- "...act" - *poieō*, manifested in works; this verb is also in the present tense, imperative mood meaning it's a continual (perpetual) command

— Both are to be done as if we will be judged by these words and works (because we will be!)

— Both Jesus (John 5:24) and Paul (Rom 8:1) assured us that Christian believers will never be judged for their sins, but our works (Rom 14:10-13; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Col 3:22-25) and our words (Matt 12:36; James 2:3) will be judged and rewarded.

- "...law of freedom" - the standard by which our works and words will be judged is the "law of freedom (liberty)". Church Age believers are under the "law of liberty." It has liberty, yet it is still a law that must be obeyed and that we will be judged by at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10).

13 For **judgment** *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

13 For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

13 For the one who has shown no mercy will be judged without mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

- "...judgment" - refers to the Bema Seat judgment of Christ, just after the Rapture
- James' reader's treatment of the poor (v1-9) reflected a lack of mercy, thus their judgment will be "merciless." A person who shows no mercy or compassion for those in need demonstrates he has not responded to the mercy of God, and will be judged accordingly.

— The point is: if we show mercy, we will gain mercy; if we show judgment, we will gain judgment

The Principle of Faith and Works James 11 Clearing Up the Confusion (James 2:14)

To understand this passage properly, one must understand the background. Unfortunately, 99% of the teaching on this passage is inaccurate. 99% of the Christian world believes that this passage says that if a believer doesn't have enough works after their (alleged) conversion to Christianity, they really were never a Christian to start with. They were a "professor" not a "possessor" of Christ and salvation. They believe and preach from this passage that if a person claims to be saved, but doesn't display the works that we believe we should see in them, then they were never saved.

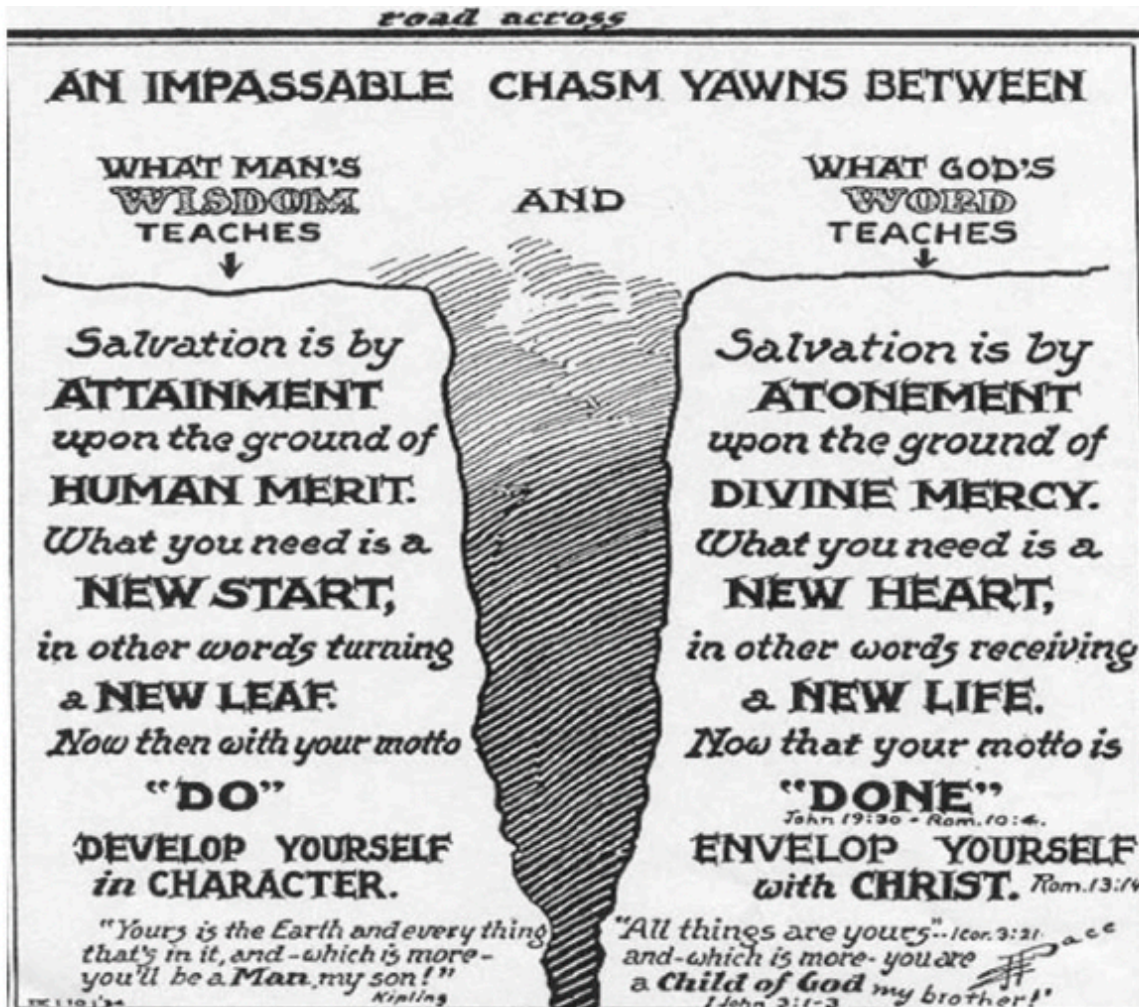
The problem with the Reformed view of this passage, the view of 99% of Christians, Bible scholars, etc. (even those who are not "Reformed" in their theology overall) is how they answer the question: How many good works does a Christian have to perform to prove they are saved? When they are asked that question, they give no specific or even suitable answer—because there isn't one.

The Reformed (majority) view of this passage asks a question that James is not answering: Those who have professed Christ at some point in the past, but who have since walked away from the faith and made no progress in their sanctification, are they really saved if they do not demonstrate good works? This is a valid question, and something that people in James' day may have wondered, as well as people today, but this is not the question James is answering in the following passage.

James is writing to an audience of *believers* (1:18; 2:5; 4:5, et al). He's not dealing with a situation where he's writing to people that he doesn't know if they are saved or not. Nowhere in this epistle does James call into question his audience's salvation. And nowhere in this passage does James ever say that if you don't have enough good works, you're not saved.

The purpose of James' epistle is to encourage and help Christians, who likely were at one time part of his ministry/church in Jerusalem, to grow in their faith. James is a book on practical righteousness, for the benefit of believers, not a book on how to be saved/justified. James is dealing with practical sanctification in this epistle, not justification.

It's sad that a passage such as this, which is one of the most straight-forward in all of Scripture on how to live the Christian life, has been corrupted so badly by Satan in the mind of many believers that it has completely lost its relevance to the Church today, except for seemingly providing Christians a baton they can use to judge or doubt the salvation of fellow believers.



Much of the misunderstanding of this passage is rooted in the differences in vocabulary used by James and Paul. If you think both are answering the same question, you'll be confused by this passage. But if you understand that James and Paul are using the same words, but in a different sense, answering different questions, you can interpret the passage properly.

Two Kinds of Faith?

Reformed Theology says that not all faith is saving faith...there is the faith that saves and the faith that doesn't save ("spurious" faith). But James knows nothing of this distinction. Any faith that is exercised in Christ for salvation saves, period.

James does not deal with this doctrine of two faiths at all...James says your faith is real, you are saved/justified, and you're going to heaven. You're one of God's children, but you're in a crisis in your life, you're afraid or intimidated to step out and do something for the Lord. James says that what you need to do is not question whether or not you're saved...you need to take the saving faith that you already have and exercise that in a

different area...no longer in the sense of justification, belief that what Christ accomplished on the cross paid the penalty of your sin...but exercise it in same God who saved you, but now apply it to your "crisis."

Many pastors who dare to preach on this passage (most avoid it like the plague) will harp on the "tension" between Paul and James, then attempt to slither a blurry line between Paul's emphatic "saved by grace through faith, not of works" and James' emphatic "faith without works is dead." The result is often a confusing gobbledygook of words without meaning. In reality, Paul and James are in complete agreement that...

- justification (forensic/heavenly) *before God* is by faith alone in Christ alone
- justification (practical/earthly) *before men* is by faith-produced works

(6) Useful faith manifests itself in works (2:14-26)

(A) Works accompany useful faith (2:14)

14 What **use is it, my brothers and sisters**, if **someone** says he has **faith**, but **he has no works**? **Can that faith save him**?

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

14 What good does it do, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but does not prove it with actions? This kind of faith cannot save him, can it?

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can [that kind of] faith save him?

- It's important to interpret these verses properly as this passage, especially v14, because it is *the* number 1 most misinterpreted passage in the entire Bible. James asks two questions about faith in relation to works. Both questions in this verse are rhetorical, and both demand a negative answer.

- James' thesis statement for this passage (v14) is: Can a believer make progress in their sanctification, become useful to God, and be fully rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ, if he has no good works? James' answer is: No!

— James' concern here is the profit that *other people* receive if a Christian has a faith that is not productive. He has a similar concern, expressed elsewhere (1:12; 2:12-13), about how a Christian without a productive faith will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

— If you're a Christian, saved by God's grace and on your way to heaven, but if there are no good works in your life that demonstrate progress in your sanctification and are a blessing to others, then you are not progressing or maturing in terms of your faith.

— James is questioning the usefulness of his reader's faith, not its existence.

- "...use is it" - *ophelos*, advantage, profit, benefit. This Greek word is only used here and 1 Cor 15:32 in the NT. The verb is in the present tense, meaning that the metaphorical

person James is referring to repeatedly says he has faith.

— However, although this person is constantly going around claiming to be a believer, there is a continual lack of any external evidence to support his claim. Doesn't mean he's not a believer, it means if he was on trial for being a Christian, there would not be enough evidence to support a conviction.

- "...my brothers *and sisters*" - in this very verse, which is so often interpreted to be directed at "spurious" believers, James identifies himself as a believer and his audience as his brothers and sisters (in Christ). In no way could proper Bible interpretation understand James' readers as either unbelievers or as "believers" in name only when he calls them his "brothers and sisters (in Christ)".

- "...someone" - *tis*, indefinite pronoun; James uses *tis* to refer to a believer in 1:23 ("any"); 1:26 ("any man"); 2:18 ("a man"); 3:2 ("any man"). Here, he is raising the issue of what a *believer* might say, not what an unbeliever might say.

- "...faith" - here is where the confusion comes in...Paul and James use the same words (see chart: **Harmony Between Paul and James** below). Paul refers to saving faith (justification); James refers to sanctifying or sustaining faith (sanctification).

— Paul's intent was to demonstrate two opposing ways of salvation (by works and by faith); James' intent was to show a contrast between two kinds of faith, a living faith and a dead faith. See quote from Lewis Sperry Chafer at end of this chapter on the various types of faith found in Scripture.

- "...he has" - *echō*, present tense, meaning that while this man is continually claiming to be saved, he continually lacks any evidential works

- "...works" - a believer's moral deeds that demonstrate to his fellow man that his faith has graduated from merely a saving faith to a serving faith.

— Paul describes works as something that cannot be used to garner favor with God. This includes salvation. A person can do nothing in and of himself to please God. James describes the works in the lives of those who have already been justified.

- "...Can that faith save him?" -

— "that faith" - speaking of a faith that has no works; this is better rendered simply as "faith" [see KJV/NKJV]. It is speaking of faith in general, not a specific type or category of faith.

— James is saying that faith is faith, but when it is divorced from works it cannot offer no deliverance from the negative consequences that come from sin. When believers choose to walk in obedience, the same faith would then have works.

— Walking in obedience delivers/saves believers from the consequences of following our sin nature and leads us instead to gain great reward in this life and the crown of life in the next life (Cf. 1:12).

— Rom 1 says if someone chooses to walk in sin, apart from God's design, God turns them over to the natural adverse consequence of sin, which leads to what we today might call addiction and loss of mental health (Cf. Rom 1:24,26,28). Thus, James is writing to equip believers to adopt a perspective that leads them to make choices that are actually in their best interest.

— "save" - can the faith that only trusts Christ for salvation, but which is not applied in our daily life, save us?

— Since the implied answer to this question in Greek is No, what is James saying this lack of demonstrated faith (works) in daily life can't save us from? It can't be hell because he is writing to believers in Christ who have already been saved/delivered/rescued from hell. He calls them "brothers and sisters in Christ" 15x in this epistle; he calls them "beloved" and "first fruits" of God's creation (1:16-18). His original audience were clearly believers, this is un-arguable.

— So the \$64000 question is: If it's not hell, what can a faith without works save us from?

— Because *sōzō* is not a technical word, whenever it is used we must look at the context and ask "who/what is being saved/delivered/rescued from what?" Take Mark 5:34 for example: And He (Jesus) said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well [*sōzō*]; go in peace and be cured of your disease." The translators could've easily rendered this verse: "Daughter, your faith has saved [*sōzō*] you; go in peace and be cured of your disease."

What Jesus said the young girl was "saved" from was her disease.

- So what is the context of *sōzō* here? Looking at the larger context, the question James is asking his saved readers in the first section of his epistle is not whether or not they have faith (are saved). He knows and confirms that they do. The question is whether their faith will be put into action, overcoming difficulties, so it can be made complete. A completed/perfected faith results in being approved at the judgment seat of Christ and receiving rewards, such as the "crown of life" (1:12).

— In order for their faith to be completed/perfected/approved, James exhorted them to lay aside the wickedness of their sin nature and replace it with the Word of God, which will save/deliver/rescue [*sōzo*] their souls from the consequences of sin (1:21).

— James makes it clear that whether or not a Christian acts upon their faith or not is their own personal choice. You can choose to act on your faith and be approved/rewarded, or you can choose to not act upon your faith and suffer the negative consequences of sin, which James calls "death" (1:15).

— Looking at immediate context (2:12-13), it carries the same basic message: believers who have been delivered from the penalty of sin through faith (a deliverance that can neither be earned or lost) have an important choice to make: whether to walk in obedience to God's commands in order to be saved/delivered from the consequences of sin and gain great rewards, or not.

— In 5:19-20, James uses *sōzō* in a similar context as v14:

19 My brothers *and sisters*, if anyone among you strays from the truth and someone turns him back,

20 let him know that the one who has turned a sinner from the error of his way will **save** [*sōzō*] **his soul from death** and cover a multitude of sins.

— The person who strays from the truth is a believer (unbelievers don't have truth, so they don't have anything to stray from). If a fellow believer "turns him back" to the truth, he saves/delivers/rescues the straying person's soul from death.

— A lack of faith in our daily walk cannot save us from the consequences of sin in our life, up to and including God's discipline of us as believers. In order to be "saved" from God's discipline and sin's deadly consequences, I need to walk by faith moment-by-moment in my daily life.

— If you read "save" here in a first tense salvation context, this is where you get the contradiction with Paul, who (rightly) stresses that one cannot be saved by works. James does not contradict Paul because James is referring to salvation/deliverance from the *power* of sin in our lives, in order to avoid the consequences of sin and not be disqualified from future rewards, not the *penalty* of our sins.

Parallel passages for James 2:14:

Matt 5:13: **"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by people.**

- Salt that loses its flavor is akin to faith that is not demonstrated through works.

Rev 3:15-16:

15 **"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.**

- "...you are neither" - Jesus is lamenting the fact that He can't use them for His purposes because they had lost their usefulness due to the fact that they weren't in a relationship with Him
- "...cold nor hot" - both cold water and hot water serve specific, beneficial purposes
 - Cold water is refreshing, thirst quenching, cooling; hot water kills germs, it is sanitizing and good for cleaning; warming

16 **So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth.**

- "...lukewarm" - contrary to what most pastors teach, this does not mean that these were professing believers who were not actually saved. The temperature of the liquid is not a commentary on the temperature of this church's spiritual life.

- The temperature refers to believers who have one foot in the church and one foot in the world; they are neither hot nor cold; they are "useless" to God
- "...I will vomit you out of My mouth" - Jesus says something similar in Matt 5:13, speaking of believers as the "salt of the earth"; if the salt loses it's saltiness, it is no longer good for anything other than to be thrown out and trampled under foot
 - If salt loses its flavor, what is it good for? Nothing. It loses it's ability to season food or preserve food; it's useless
 - This is what was happening in Laodicea...they had no utility to Christ in the realm of using their lives to move forward His purposes
 - Jesus is commenting at the nauseous feeling He has when He looks at the man-centered church at Laodicea

It would be difficult to find a concept which is richer and more varied in meaning than the biblical concept of salvation. The breadth of salvation is so sweeping and its intended aim so magnificent that in many contexts the words used defy precise definition. Yet these difficulties have not thwarted numerous interpreters from assuming, often without any contextual justification, that the words used invariably mean 'deliverance from hell' or 'go to heaven when you die.' It may come as a surprise to many that this usage of 'salvation' (soteria) would have been the least likely meaning to come to the mind of a reader of the Bible in the first century. Indeed, in 812 usages of the various Hebrew words translated 'to save' or 'salvation' in the Old Testament, only 58 (7.1 percent) refer to eternal salvation.
[Dillow]

Bad Takes on James 2:14

1. James thought it was impossible for someone be saved/justified with no works.
2. James does not contradict Paul, he merely clarifies the *kind of faith* that saves. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works, but *saving faith will have works that accompany it.*
3. We're saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone.
4. Can faith save him? James says the *profession* of faith cannot save you. It is not said that he *has faith*, but that *he says that he has faith.*
5. It is faith that justifieth the man; but they are works that justify faith to be right and real, saving and justifying.
6. Works *must* accompany a genuine faith, because genuine faith is always connected with regeneration – being born again, becoming a *new creation* in Jesus ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). If there is no evidence of a new life, then there was no genuine, saving faith.
7. The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.

8. Here is a proof that faith cannot exist without being active in works of righteousness. His faith in God would have been of no avail to him, had it not been manifested by works.
9. Work-less faith is a barren faith, not the kind of faith that produces or gives birth to salvation.
10. True faith in Christ will always/inevitably lead to a changed life.
11. If there is no evidence of growth and good works, we have reason to doubt that salvation ever truly took place.
12. A "dead" faith is not a saving faith.
13. The idea that a "true" Christian can remain carnal for long periods of time, or an entire lifetime, is a dangerous teaching in that it excuses various ungodly lifestyles.
14. James' purpose is not to deny justification by faith, but to correct a misunderstanding of what real faith is.

Titus 3:8: This statement is trustworthy; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that **those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and beneficial for people.**

Harmony Between Paul and James		
	PAUL	JAMES
Justification	Declaration of innocence before God	Evidence of usefulness of believer's faith before man
Save	Justification	Sanctification
Faith	Saving faith	Serving faith
Works	Favor with God	Believer's moral deeds

1. Issue

- Paul in Galatians is addressing self-righteous Judaism. He's dealing with people who think they can earn justification/favor from God through good works. They are trying to save themselves through good works rather than by faith.
 - James is dealing with dead orthodoxy. He doesn't even get into an issue around justification because his readers are already believers. He consistently calls them "my brethren" and talks about "their faith being tested." Your faith can't be tested if you are not in faith (saved). James is dealing with saved people who are not available for use as God would like to use them (Cf. Eph 2:10).
2. Justification: both Paul and James use the term "justification" but they mean different things:
- Paul is talking about a declaration of innocence before God, which we receive when we trust Christ. To Paul, justification meant acquittal, and Paul was concerned with legal justification in that no man can gain justification by means of works, specifically the works of the Law.
 - James is talking about the evidence of the usefulness of somebody's faith, not before God but before man. He's not questioning if they have saving faith, he's questioning if their faith is useful before man. Is God using them to reach others? To James, justification meant vindication, and he was concerned with the justification of one's profession of faith in that his claim must be demonstrated by his works, specifically the works of love and faith.
3. Genesis: both Paul and James quote Genesis
- In Rom 4:3, Paul quotes Gen 15:6, describing Abram's justification before God
 - James quotes Gen 22, the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice of Isaac. Gen 15:6 is where Abraham got saved/justified, Gen 22 is where Abraham's faith became useful, and he was justified before man. Chronologically, it took about 20 years (between Gen 15 and Gen 22) for Abraham's faith to no longer be just dead orthodoxy, but productive. Abraham was saved before God in Gen 15, but he did not become justified before man in terms of useful, productive faith, a faith that God can use, until Gen 22.
4. Faith
- When Paul talks about faith in Gal 2:16, he is referring to our justification before God.

- James talks about faith, he is referring to that same faith (by which we were justified before God) and says that it is the same faith you'll need to pay next month's mortgage payment. Or what if you get laid off from your job...you'll have to have faith that God will provide and carry you through. So the faith that Paul talks about saves once and for all; James talks about how that same faith is used over and over again, contributing not to your justification (which is already a done deal), but to your sanctification. Paul is talking about faith in the sense of justification; James is talking about faith in the sense of sanctification.

5. Works:

- Paul argued against works as a means of justification (Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9). When Paul uses the term "works" he is referring to people who believe they can curry God's favor by their good works. Paul condemns it, because we're justified by faith alone.
- James argued in favor of works in the lives of those who have already been justified. When James talks about works, he's talking about the believer's moral deeds. James encourages it, because he's exhorting his readers to get out of dead orthodoxy.

Here's what the Christian life looks like, and what the story of Abraham is designed to tell us: A person hears the gospel and gets saved. They are justified before God at that point in time, their position is eternally settled. Then God begins to grow them up, often through trials, bringing them into maturity. He gets them into an environment where they can be taught correctly, He gets them into the spiritual disciplines (reading/studying the Bible, prayer, worship). The person starts to grow and develop spiritually, then they reach a point where God begins to use them to bless other people.

Paul is dealing with the front end of this equation...justification before God. James is dealing with the back end of this equation. If you understand that Galatians and James are asking and answering two different questions, the contradictions and confusion between the two melt away.

The doctrine of salvation is a wonderful thing. It's not just hearing the gospel and trusting in Christ so I don't go to hell. It's growing to the point of usefulness. James is dealing with the usefulness side, Paul is dealing with the first step, which is justification. If you don't understand that they are discussing different sides of the doctrine, they look like they contradict each other.

James will now go on for 12 verses giving five illustrations to back up and bolster his thesis statement (v14). None of these illustrations say that if you don't have enough works you're not a Christian. Rather, these illustrations show that a believer must demonstrate works in

order to be useful and productive, not something to rely on to get to heaven. Our good works toward others are something that God uses to advance His cause and purposes on the earth, not to save people.

1. Brother in need (2:15-17)
2. An objection (2:18-20)
3. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (2:21-24)
4. Rahab and the spies (2:25)
5. Body and its spirit (2:26)

(B) Illustrations (2:15-26)

(a) Brother in need (2:15-17)

15 If a **brother or sister** is without clothing and in need of daily food,

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

15 Suppose a brother or sister does not have any clothes or daily food

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

- "...brother or sister" - refers to a fellow believer

— This metaphorical fellow believer lacks the basic needs in this life; they are poor and in desperate need of help

— For James, a poor believer without clothing or daily food was not a hypothetical situation, since he was the pastor of a poverty-stricken church (Acts 4:35; 6:1; 11:29-30; Rom 15:25-31; 1 Cor 16:3)

16 and **one of you** says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, **what use is that?**

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?

16 and one of you tells them, "Go in peace! Stay warm and eat heartily." If you do not provide for their bodily needs, what good does it do?

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

- After defining the need (v15), James now gives the response of dead works. **He compares faith without works to words of compassion without acts of compassion.**

— The point is that people with dead faith (a faith separated from Christ) substitute nice words for good deeds. They are all talk and no action. They know the correct vocabulary for prayer, testimony, etc. The issue here is not inability, but a non-working faith.

- "...one of you" - in no way could this be referring to an unbeliever

— James is raising the issue of brothers and sisters in Christ who have unmet need for the vital essentials of life. If a believer ignores their obvious need, it doesn't mean that person either lost their salvation or were never truly saved. It means they have a faith that doesn't work; their faith is of no profit or benefit to other believers.

- "...what use is that?" - the rhetorical question again demands a negative answer: there is no profit either to the speaker or to the recipient of these words

— This verse gives us the purpose of prosperity. Why does God put into the hands of some Christians material things above and beyond what they need? What is God's purpose for blessing some believers high and above their basic needs?

— His purpose is for those articles of wealth to be a blessing to someone else. God has blessed us so that we can be a blessing of others. That is the purpose of prosperity, not so I can raise my standard of living, but rather to raise the standard of living of others, especially within the body of Christ (Cf. Matt 10:8; 2 Cor 8:14; 1 John 3:17).

— What if I have the world's goods, been blessed abundantly by God, and I see a person in need and do not do anything tangible help them? See v17.

17 In the same way, faith also, if it has no **works**, is **dead**, *beingbyitself*.

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it does not prove itself with actions, is dead.

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

- This verse is James' conclusion to his point in v14 and his example in v15-16

- If we don't understand God's purpose in providing prosperity, this verse describes the circumstance that we find ourselves in...

- "In the same way" - in the same way that words of compassion without acts of compassion is without power, not helpful, and inactive, faith without works is powerless, not helpful, inactive.

- "...faith" - not saving faith, but serving faith; the person described here is saved, they just are not living by faith

- "...works" - the believer's moral deeds

— His conclusion is that you (believers) have saving faith in Christ, which justifies you before God and get you into heaven one day, but you are not using that same faith in Christ to produce God-ordained good works in your life, thus your saving faith is "dead" (separated from Christ) and thus your faith is of no profit or benefit to others and is separated from God's purpose.

- "...dead" - *nekros*, destitute of force or power; inactive; inoperative. The Biblical definition of "dead" always carries the idea of "separation"; it *never* refers to non-existence (see notes on Eph 2:1).

— If you read faith without works is "dead" and equate "dead" with non-existence, you have created an anachronistic (outside of time) exegetical fallacy because you have defined "death" by the 21st century definition and read it back into a 1st century context.

— Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body; the soul goes to heaven or hell, the body goes into the ground. Neither become non-existent. The "second death" (Rev 20:6) is separate of the soul from God. Spiritual death is separation from God.

— So James is not saying that faith does not exist. It does exist, but it is "dead"—separated from God's intent and purpose and useless to mankind. Thus, James is in total and complete agreement with Paul, who says we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph 2:10; Cf. Titus 3:5-8).

— In this case the faith that exists is separated from works. If someone's faith is separated from their works, that person has a saving faith only; they do not have a serving faith.

— Their faith that they have, which gets them into heaven one day, does not have any useful or productive sense because they've been given the world's goods, but they don't use them for any beneficial purpose to fulfill God's will.

— Here are some examples of how "death" is used throughout Scripture to illustrate separation, not non-existence. There is not a single verse or example in Scripture where "death" means non-existence. It's a concept completely foreign to the Bible:

- Gen 2:17: but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for **on the day** that you eat from it you will certainly **die.**"
 - Death in this context ("on the day") could not have meant physical death because Adam did not physically die that day...he lived for 930 years
 - What God meant when He said "on that day...you will certainly die" is that Adam would "die" spiritually (be separated from God). Physical death would come later (much later), but "on that day" when he ate the fruit, death referred to spiritual separation from God.
- Gen 3:8: Now they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
 - After the Fall, Adam and Eve were still able to respond to God. Their problem after they "died" was not non-existence, it was separation from God (Cf. Is 59:1-2).
- Dan 12:2: And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt.
 - Every single human being, when they die, remains alive and alert and will one day be resurrected to stand in judgment before God
- Eccl 12:7: then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

- Upon death, the human spirit does not stop existing...it returns back to the Creator (is separated from the body)
 - Matt 25:46: **These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."**
 - When we die, our soul and body are separated; the soul does not stop existing, it's just separated
 - Matt 27:50-51:

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and **gave up His spirit**. 51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

 - When Jesus died, did He stop existing? No! His soul (spirit) was temporarily separated from His physical body.
 - Luke 15:24: **for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found!** And they began to celebrate.
 - The prodigal son was not physically dead...he had returned to the father, and the father is describing his son's previous condition as "dead" (separated from him) and "lost"
 - Luke 23:46: And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, **"Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I ENTRUST MY SPIRIT."** And having said this, He **died**.
 - When Jesus died, His spirit was separated from His body and went back into the hands of the Father
 - Acts 7:59: They *went on* stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"
 - Stephen understood that upon the death of his physical body, his spirit would be separated from it and go to heaven
 - Phil 1:21-23:

21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to **die** is gain. 22 But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;

 - Paul never anticipated not existing after his death...he knew he would continue to exist in heaven
 - 1 Tim 5:6: But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is **dead even while she lives**.
 - Death for this woman didn't mean non-existence because she was still alive. "Dead" meant she was separated from God.
- Reformed Theology denies that someone can have saving faith but not serving faith. They believe that a saving faith that is not a serving faith is no faith. The reason is because they

impose their preconceived construct onto Scripture, rather than allow Scripture to inform their construct. Their preconceived construct is Calvinism, which says that unless you have works and you're persevering in those good works, you're not a Christian. You have a miracle faith, not a saving faith.

- "...by itself" - the faith that is "by itself" or alone is one's saving faith. This phrase proves that the person James is describing has saving faith, because that faith is "by itself" because there are no accompanying works.

— Once a believer allows the Holy Spirit to take the faith we already have and come under His conviction, and you have the world's goods, and you have the faith to step out and use those goods to bless others who are in need practically, and you help them.

— You see the need, you have the ability and means to meet that need, and you don't help them...these are the people James is talking about. If this happens, that person's faith is separated (dead) from their works, which means their faith "by itself" is just a saving faith and hasn't yet graduated into a serving faith.

So if you read "faith without works is dead" and say that if there's not enough works then in someone's life then their faith non-existent (they aren't saved), then you're violating both the Greek and Hebrew definitions of "death" and making James say something that he isn't saying.

See extensive notes on Eph 2:1 for how "death" is used throughout Scripture. For additional background on this interpretation, and further evidence, see:

[James 12 Faith Without Works is Dead? - Part 1 \(James 2:14\)](#)

[James 13 Faith Without Works is Dead? - Part 2 \(James 2:14-19\)](#)

[James 14 Faith Without Works is Dead? - Part 3 \(James 2:20-24\)](#)

Translation (v15-17): If you, as a believer, see another believer in desperate need, but all you do is say some comforting words to them, but you never give them what they need when it is easily within your power to do so, how are your words helpful to them? They're not helpful at all!

And in the same way your words alone were not helpful to the person in need, if you aren't exercising faith to produce good works in your life, your faith is inactive, with no power. You have faith, but nothing else.

Summary of James 2:14-17

James' concern in this paragraph is highlighted in the word "profit" (v14). "What profit" he asks "is faith without works?" This profit is man-ward (to "brothers and sisters") as he illustrates in v15-16, ending with the question, "what does this non-works response profit the needy brother or sister?" James' conclusion (v17) is that saving faith, without any

works, is dead because it is alone (all you have is saving faith, and you aren't exercising it to benefit others). This Christian person's faith is separated ("dead") from God's intent (Eph 2:10), which is for the profit and benefit others. Nor can this faith have the benefits for its possessor that God has designed, which is to save/deliver him from the power of sin in his life.

(b) An objection (2:18-20)

18 But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; **show** me your faith without the works, and I will **show** you my faith **by** my works."

18 But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

18 But someone may say, "You have faith, and I have actions." Show me your faith without any actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

- This is a very confusing and difficult to understand passage (v18-20), one that nearly no one interprets properly. In order to interpret it properly, especially the dialogue between James and the imaginary objector, you must understand their arguments:

- James' argument is: faith and works have such an intimate connection with each other that if a person does not add works to their faith, then the faith they have is useless.
- The objector's argument is the opposite: faith and works are separate things that can exist apart from each other and prove nothing about each other.

— James just stated that "faith without works is dead" (v17). The imaginary objector believes the opposite, that faith without works is "alive" because faith and works are separate, not connected. Faith and works can be exercised independently.

— The thinking that James is countering here is that spiritual growth and maturity can come through faith alone or through works alone. We are justified by faith alone, but that faith is not evident to others, until it is exercised in good works.

— Some of James' readers may have thought that faith and works are two separate approaches to God. That they could grow spiritually through faith, or through works, but that they were two separate categories that exist in isolation. James uses the argument from this imaginary objector to point out that faith and works are inextricably linked in a growing and maturing Christian.

— This thinking is understandable in James' readers since James was the first NT epistle, and Jewish believers at that time understood the doctrine of faith-alone-in-Christ-alone for salvation. They simply extended that thought from justification into sanctification. James, however, saw this as a mistake when it comes to their sanctification.

- "But someone may *well* say" - a common way for NT authors to introduce an objection (Cf. Rom 9:19; 11:19; 1 Cor 15:35). James knows that some of his readers will feel defensive about his exhortation to put action to their words, works to their faith. So James constructs a dialogue here designed to answer their objection preemptively.

— It's likely that James has heard this same objection before, and that there was some kind of debate among early Church Age believers about faith and works, which is why James tries to preempt their argument with this hypothetical.

- It is important to note here that the NASB20 and NASB95 end the quotation of the "objector" after v18, indicating that v19 is not part of the objector's objection. The NIV and ESV end the quotation even earlier, after "works." Since there is no punctuation in Koine Greek, it is up to the translator what is included in the quotation and what is not.

— It is likely that the NASB, NIV, and ESV all get it wrong, and that the objector's quotation should end after "shudder" in v19. So the objection begins in v18 and carries all the way through v19. There are a few reasons for this, which assist with the interpretation of v19:

1. The objection does not support James' assertion that "faith without works is dead" (v17) if it doesn't include both v18-19.
2. The illustration about demons having faith (v19) fits the objection, not James' earlier instruction. James is not using demons as an illustration. It is the "foolish person" (v20) who is using demons as an illustration to argue that James believes in God and does good things, but demons also believe in God and they don't do good things, thus faith and works are unrelated.
3. To attribute to James the statement "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" would cause James to be responding to the objector with a senseless argument.
4. James would be asserting by way of refutation that *You believe God is one. You do well.* Neither of these statements would relate to nor in any way answer the objector's statement *You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*
5. James would be challenging the objector to show him *faith without the works*, when the objector did not assert that he had any faith. He asserted that he had only had works (*I have works*).
6. The Objector claimed to have works, so for James to claim in response that *I will show you my faith by my works*, it would seem James is conceding the argument, since the objector began by claiming he had works.
7. If the quotation ended after *You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works*, then James's response to that assertion would be to invoke demons and faith, which fails to make sense.

- "...show" [2x] - *deiknyō*, to demonstrate; to give evidence or proof of something; literally, "to show to the eyes"

— Faith is not visible, but works usually are. James' point is that the existence of faith in a believer cannot be proven or demonstrated without works because faith is intangible, invisible, not something seen. Thus, the only way a believer can demonstrate to others that he has faith is through the existence of visible works.

— In this case, both men have faith, but one of them cannot substantiate or demonstrate their faith because they have no outward works

- "...by" - *ek*, "out of"; the works described here are not produced by the believer through human power, but rather borne by the believer "out of" their faith.

- So here is how the dialogue between James would read if it were a movie script (v18-20):

James: "But someone may well say,"

Objector: "You (James) have faith and I (Objector) have works; (James) show me your faith without the works, and I (Objector) will show you my faith by my works. You (James) believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."

James: "But are you (Objector) willing to recognize, you fool, that faith without works is useless?"

19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

19 You believe that there is one God. That's fine! Even the demons believe that and tremble with fear.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

- The imaginary objector now gives an illustration to support his argument that faith and works are separate things that exist apart from each other and prove nothing about each other.

— The objector uses demons as an illustration to argue that James believes in God and does good things, but demons also believe in God and they don't do good things, thus faith and works are unrelated. Both believe the same thing, but only one has works.

- If you interpret v19 as James' response to the objector rather than an illustration by the objector, James would be making a senseless argument to the objector's statement *You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works* by arguing that demons believe in God. That makes no sense. See notes on v18 for seven reasons why v19 should be considered part of the objection.

— It would also mean that James was challenging the objector to show him faith without the works when the objector did not assert that he had any faith. He asserted that he only had works.

This verse has been completely hijacked by Reformed theology (Calvinism) to push the belief that there are two types of faith: genuine faith, which they call "saving faith," which always demonstrates itself in works, and "spurious" faith, a faith that does not save, which doesn't demonstrate itself in works.

Thus, they say that the person with "spurious" (non-salvific) faith has only demonstrated "intellectual ascent" and thus does not have a "saving faith," similar to that of a demon. A demon believes that "God is one," which is a correct belief, but demons are not saved. Therefore they reason that the "intellectual ascent" of the demon is not sufficient for salvation, and in the same way, the intellectual ascent of a person is not enough to be saved.

There are so many things wrong with this interpretation that it's difficult to know where to begin in refuting it. Besides the fact that it is included as part of an objection that James is raising, and the context has nothing to do with salvation/justification, which should be enough to refute this argument on its face, I've included some other arguments against this interpretation:

- This verse DOES NOT say that some people can believe but not be saved because the belief James outlines here does not lead to salvation. Monotheism is not the gospel. Believing God is One is not the condition for salvation; believing (trusting) in the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross is.
- The plan of salvation is not open to demons. Jesus did not become a demon to die for the sins of the world...He became a Man. Thus, it doesn't matter what a demon believes, because they have no path to salvation.

20 But are you **willing to acknowledge**, you **foolish person**, that faith without works is **useless**?

20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

20 Do you want proof, you foolish person, that faith without actions is worthless?

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

- James now responds to the objector, who is arguing that faith and works are independent of each other by stating that if that is the case, then the faith that is independent of works is useless.

- "...willing to acknowledge" - *ginōskō*, to learn to know or come to know; "to want proof" of something [ISV]

- "...foolish person" - James called the objector a fool because his argument misses the point: if a person has faith but does not have works, the faith they have is useless.

— Paul also used derogatory words for those who don't understand basic theology (basically, the person of v14): the Galatians thought they could live for God through their own power, and Paul calls them "foolish" (Cf. Gal 3:1,3).

- "...useless" - *argos*, useless, non-effectual, idle, unemployed; the NASB translators get it right when they translate *argos* as "useless" rather than "dead" because they recognize that death doesn't mean non-existence, but rather separation. James will further explain what he meant by *argos* (useless) in v21-23.

— James is addressing the mistaken assumption that spiritual growth is achieved through faith alone apart from works. There were evidently at least some members of James' audience who weren't helping anyone, while at the same time boasting about their faith in Christ.

— The people whose faith is "useless" are saved. James is not doubting their salvation, he is saying that the faith they have will get them to heaven one day, but it won't help anyone in the here and now. It ought to be helping others as well as themselves, but since it is "by itself" it's not helping anyone.

— On top of that, because they are not exercising their faith, they are not being delivered from their own internal wickedness (saved from the power and consequences of sin in their lives), nor are they growing in their walk of faith so that they can one day be approved and receive rewards (1:12).

Titus 3:14: Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unproductive.

2 Peter 1:8: For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they do not make you useless nor unproductive in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

— Note how often James writes about the uselessness of faith unaccompanied by works, not the absence of faith unaccompanied by works (Cf. 1:26; 2:14,16,20)

— James is not second-guessing the salvation of his audience. When he says "dead" he doesn't mean that their faith is non-existent and they are not saved. He means that their faith is useless because God can't use them to do the things He wants to do.

— Examples of the things that God wanted to do in James' original audience included...

- Having the right mindset during trials (1:2-4)
- Perfect their faith and bring them to maturity through trials (1:5-8)
- Persevere during trials (1:12)
- Keep a right view of God during a trial (1:13-17)
- Run to God's Word in the midst of a trial (1:18-21)
- Be doers of the Word, not hearers only (1:22-25)
- Bless widows and orphans (1:27)
- Counter favoritism in the church (2:1-8)

— If God could not do these things through them because of their lack of faith, they could not be saved from the power and consequences of sin in their lives.

In v18-20, James detailed an objection that he anticipated from some of his readers. The objection was that, in the context of spiritual maturity, faith and works are separate and have no relationship with each other. James responded by saying that type of thinking was foolishness (v20). Now he gives two examples of how the objection is wrong to prove that works give life and bring meaning to our faith. To do this, he uses two OT figures that his readers would be familiar with: Abraham (v21-24) and Rahab (v25).

(c) Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (2:21-24)

21 Was **our father** Abraham not **justified by works when** he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

21 Our ancestor Abraham was justified by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar, wasn't he?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

- The assumed answer to the question in Greek is Yes, he was!

- "...our father" - James was Jewish; this is more evidence that he was writing to Jewish believers (1:1; Cf. Rom 4:16-17; Gal 3:7,29). All believers can call Abraham "father" in a spiritual sense (Gal 3:29) because Abraham was justified by faith just like we are today.

- "...justified" - *dikaioō*, like "salvation/saved," it is not a technical term, meaning it does not always have the same meaning every time it is used.

— Justification is when "something aligns with a standard." For example, a left-justified paragraph is one that aligns with the left margin. Someone indicted for a crime is justified if they are found innocent, that they have sufficiently aligned with the applicable laws. Believers are justified in the sight of God when we believe in Jesus, thus aligning us with the righteousness of God.

— The failure to define *dikaioō* correctly here, in context, is what has led many pastors to conclude that everyone who is truly justified will inevitably behave righteously.

— The confusion comes when you interpret Paul and James in the same way:

- Paul uses this term in a vertical sense (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16), man being justified (declared righteous) by God.
- James uses this term in a horizontal sense to describe the usefulness of a believer's faith before men.

— James uses *dikaioō* in the same (horizontal) sense as Jesus does in Matt 12:37.

37 For by your words you will be **justified**, and by your words you will be **condemned.**"

- "...by works" - the believer's moral deeds, borne out of faith; not someone attempting to gain favor with God through good works

— Abraham was justified before God by faith alone, but he was justified before men by works alone. A person cannot be justified before God by anything other than faith, but a person cannot be justified before man by anything other than works.

- "...when" - James' question is: Was Abraham justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

- NO, if you interpret "justified" here as being declared righteous *before God* and gaining entrance into heaven
- YES, if you interpret "justified" here as being declared righteous *before man*

— This verse makes it clear that James is speaking of justification as seen by men or as made apparent to men. Works can be seen, faith cannot.

- Abraham was justified *before God* (saved) when God declared him righteous (Gen 15:6)
- Abraham was justified *before man* (sanctified) some 20 years later after he obeyed God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen 22)

- Abraham was justified by God in Gen 15:6, but he was not justified before man (meaning his faith in God was not evident before men) for decades later (Gen 22), when he obeyed God and sacrificed his only son Isaac.

— It was at that point (the sacrifice of Isaac) that Abraham's faith, which was already in existence for 20 years, came to the point where it was a useful, productive faith. It was at this point that Abraham was justified in the eyes of man, because his faith had become useful. It took God 20 years to make Abraham's saving faith useful as serving faith.

- James here is urging his readers (and US!) to move on from being just Gen 15:6 believers into being Gen 22 believers

— If it was guaranteed that every Christian would become a Gen 22 believer, why would James write this epistle? There's a prevalent teaching in Christianity that if you are "truly" a Christian, you'll just keep on growing and maturing in your faith and you'll automatically be useful to God. If that was true, James wouldn't need to write this book.

— Having a faith that is useful to God is not guaranteed or automatic. God has to continually put us into circumstances where we're required to trust Him, which develops our saving faith into a serving faith.

Abraham was declared righteous more than once. Most interpreters understand the first scriptural statement of his justification as describing his 'new birth,' to use the NT term (Gen 15:6). This is when God declared Abraham righteous. James explains (v21) that **20 years after** Abraham was declared righteous, he was 'justified' again. Scripture consistently teaches that believers whom God declares righteous never lose their righteous standing before God (Rom 5:1; 8:1, et al). They do not need to be saved again.

Abraham's subsequent, second 'justification' refers to a second declaration of his righteousness. His first declaration of righteousness came by faith (belief); the second time he was declared righteous his *works* declared him righteous before men. They (his works) gave testimony (bore witness) to his faith. Works do not always evidence faith (v19), but sometimes they do. They do so whenever a person who has become a believer by faith continues to live by faith. Abraham is a good example of a believer whose good works (obedience to God) bore witness to his righteousness. He continued to live by faith, just as he had been declared righteous by faith. [Thomas Constable, www.soniclight.com, James notes]

Why is it important to note the 20 years between Abraham's justification before God (Gen 15:6) and his faith becoming useful (justified before man, Gen 22)? Because it shows God's timing...Christians today see someone get saved and if that person has not completely cleaned up their act in a week or two, they surmise that their faith must not have been real. However, it took Abraham 20 years to "clean up his act" and demonstrate his faith in God before man.

We want to see with our own eyes evidence of a person's salvation, otherwise we surmise that they must not truly be saved. We totally forget the biblical reality that this process took 20 years for Abraham. Thus, we should give new believers some breathing room. God is at work in people's lives in ways we don't know about or can't see.

It's an interesting question: If someone believes in Christ but does not have any good works to show for it, is that person really saved? This isn't even the question James is asking. Whether or not someone is saved is not the topic that James is addressing here. James assumes their faith is real, and is addressing the process that is necessary to move them from saving faith to serving faith.

22 **You** see that **faith was working with his works**, and as a result of the **works, faith was perfected**;

22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

22 You see that his faith worked together with what he did, and by his actions his faith was made complete.

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?
- This verse has in view the God-designed reciprocity between faith (in the second tense of salvation) and works

— Faith in Christ and His finished work at Calvary has a divine goal: GROWTH! Works produced from faith move a believer toward God's goal—maturity—so that their faith is "perfected" or "brought to its goal."

- James does not want his believing readers to ignore or be ignorant of the function that works play in the outworking of God's plan
- "You" - singular, referring to the imaginary objector in v18-19, who thinks that faith and works are independent of each other (see notes there)
- "...faith" [2x] - serving faith, not saving faith
- "...was working with" - *synergeō*, the basis of James' argument against the objection: faith and works are intended to work together, to be "synergistic" with each other. They are not two independent things, as the objection stated.
- "...works" [2x] - a believer's good deeds
- "...perfected" - *teleioō*, aorist passive indicative, meaning "brought to maturity or completion"; "brought to its goal" (Cf. Heb 5:14). It carries the idea of reaching a conclusion, getting to the finish line. It is getting to the point where all that was intended by God to be accomplished has been fulfilled.
- Once works were added to Abraham's faith, it caused the growth of his faith. In the same way, when we add works to our faith, our faith grows to the point of being "perfected" or complete.
- The picture here is that God's purpose for our lives is fulfilled when we walk in the obedience of faith. It produces the same result that James says the testing of our faith during trials produces (1:4), which is Christlikeness.
- The picture of faith being "perfected" or "completed" is in contrast to faith that is "dead" (v14) and "useless" (v20) because that faith is divorced from works.
- The verb *teleioō* here is in the passive tense, which indicates it was *God* who brought Abraham's faith to its goal through this experience, not Abraham
- When works are added to faith, faith is perfected, it is complete, reaching its logical conclusion. Faith with no works is useless—it does no one any good. And the inverse is also true: works done without faith are hollow and do not please God (Cf. Heb 11:6). They are simply a performance done to hide sin or win approval from men (Cf. Rom 7:6; Eph 6:6-7; Heb 6:1).
- In the case of Abraham, 20 years after he was declared righteous by God (Gen 15:6) his works finally caught up with his faith. He no longer had just a saving faith, but he now had a serving faith. This is when Abraham's faith was "perfected."
- This verse isn't saying that Abraham all of a sudden had faith in Gen 22 that he didn't have before; it is saying that Abraham's faith (that he had all along) began working in tandem with his works in Gen 22, which justified him before man and "perfected" his faith (brought his faith to its goal).
- Abraham was not made right before God only after his obedience. We're only made right before God by faith in His Son, whose righteousness is transferred to us at the point of faith alone. Abraham was made right (justified) before man after his obedience.

[Heb 5:14]

23 and the Scripture was **fulfilled** which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called a **friend of God**.

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

23 And so the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." And so he was called God's friend.

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

- "...fulfilled" - *plēroō*, to fill up; to make full; to consummate or complete; to carry into effect or bring to realization. When a Scripture is "fulfilled" it means that what was spoken before has come to pass. The Scripture that was fulfilled is Gen 15:6, which is quoted here.

— The faith that Abraham demonstrated by offering Isaac "brought his justification" into effect or into realization. It demonstrated to men the unseen/invisible faith that Abraham already had, which he first exercised 20 years earlier when God declared him righteous because of his faith, APART from/without works (Cf. Rom 4:1-5).

- "...friend of God" - a believer who is obedient to God; there is a difference between being a believer and being a "friend" of God. The distinction between believer and friend comes from Jesus in the Upper Room (John 15:14-15).

— Abraham was justified by God in Gen 15:6, but he became a "friend of God" in Gen 18:17 (Cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8). It wasn't until Gen 18:17 that Abraham was qualified to receive additional (prophetic) insight from God, related to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

— Abraham was saved in Gen 15, became a friend of God in Gen 18 (an obedient believer) so God gave him prophetic insight into what He was going to do with Sodom and Gomorrah. Once Abraham became an obedient believer, he became entitled to additional insight. Simple faith gets you a ticket to heaven; being a "friend of God" gets you insight into God's plans: "all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15b)

— You can have a ticket to heaven through faith alone in Christ alone, but not be a friend of God. All friends of God are believers, but not all believers are friends of God.

— What happens to the mind of an obedient believer, who grows into a friend of God? Their level of insight and understanding into the things of God increases dramatically. You begin to have insight into things that 5-10 years ago you knew nothing about.

— Once you understand this, you can rightly interpret passages like John 2:23-25 and John 15:14-15:

14 You are My friends if you do what I command you.

15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for **all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.**

— God is not going to disclose additional insight to a believer who is not obedient to God because if we're disobedient with the little things, we'll be disobedient with the bigger things. So why should God trust a believer, who is not a friend, with additional insight into His workings and plans?

— Take for example you're running a business. Who do you trust with the company secrets, the passwords, access to the bank account? The guy who started last week, or the guy who has shown himself to be a trustworthy and loyal employee for 15 years?

— Jesus previously considered the disciples as "slaves" in the sense that they were without additional insight. The disciples, who had been saved ~3 years prior, did not become "friends" of Christ until the Upper Room, just before the end of Jesus' ministry.

— Why? Because it was at this point that they were willing to obey Him. And because they were willing to obey Him, He could trust them with additional revelation.

— Judas had already departed the room (John 13), so in this passage Jesus was addressing 11 saved people

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

24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

24 You observe that a person is justified through actions and not through faith alone.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

- "You" - plural, not singular, referring to the his audience ("brothers and sisters," v14), and us today, his readers

- "...justified" - *dikaioō*, used in the horizontal sense, before others; to be vindicated before men

- "...works" - a believer's moral deeds

- "...faith" - not saving faith but serving (second tense salvation) faith

- "...alone" - *monos*, an adverb (not adjective) that modifies the verb "justified"; James is saying that a by-faith justification is not the only kind of justification that there is. There is also a by-works justification. If there was only one type of justification, James would not need to use the word "alone."

— Justification by faith is before God; justification by works is before men

- The use of *monos* as an adjective, which is the case for most English translations, expresses the view that justification does not occur by faith alone, but rather by faith and works. But this clashes with Paul's doctrine of justification by faith "alone."

— The English renders *monos* as either an adjective or an adverb, however the Greek and Latin clearly convey that the word used here is an adverb, not an adjective.

- Those who interpret *monos* here as an adjective rather than an adverb finesse the difficulty by saying that James knew that justification is by faith alone, but that the kind of faith that justifies is never alone.

— They say that faith alone is the basis for the person receiving eternal justification, but deny that any workless person ever receives eternal justification. Another way of expressing their view is that both faith and works must be present for eternal justification, but God only takes into account faith when considering entrance into heaven.

- In contrary to the adjective view, the adverb view (which is what the text actually says, and is supported in the original Greek) indicates that James speaks of two separate justifications. James already knows that his original readers understand that eternal justification occurs by faith alone (Cf. v23).

— Gen 15:6 was true of Abraham before he had any works. It was also true well before he became a "friend of God" through obedience.

— Since *monos* is adverbial, James does not see eternal justification by faith alone as the only type of justification. Abraham was justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar. This is not describing a justification without works, so it cannot be an eternal justification before God.

— This means that there are two justifications:

- A justification by faith alone in Christ alone (between man and God), when God declares man righteous based on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- A justification by works (between man and man) when man validates/vindicates his faith through his works.

Compare Rom 4:1-5 with James 2:21-24

Abraham matured into serving faith in the eyes of his fellow man. He was justified (declared righteous) in the eyes of *man* the moment he was willing to obey God's command to sacrifice Isaac. That was the time Abraham's saving faith became useful to God.

Translation: Through the example of Abraham, it is evident that a believer is justified before mankind by his good moral deeds, but that is not all. He is also justified before God, by faith.

The adverbial form of *monos* renders the meaning of this verse as: A man is justified by works, and not only justified by faith. Or, a man is not only justified by faith, but also by works.

Two Unfortunate Interpretations

1. *Unproductive faith cannot save, because it is not genuine faith. Faith and works are like a two-coupon ticket to heaven. The coupon of works is not good for passage, and the coupon of faith is not valid if detached from works.* [Ryrie Study Bible, James 2:24]
2. We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. A true faith expresses itself and proves its existence by a life that glorifies God.

(d) Rahab and the spies (2:25)

25 **In the same way**, was Rahab the **prostitute** not **justified** by works also when she **received the messengers** and sent them out by another way?

25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

25 Likewise, Rahab the prostitute was justified through actions when she welcomed the messengers and sent them away on a different road, wasn't she?

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

- Rahab is the second illustration that James gives his imaginary objector to prove that faith and works go together like horse and carriage...

- "In the same way" - James' second example of justification by works, this time of Rahab, teaches the same lesson as the first example (Abraham): just as Abraham was justified before man through his works, Rahab was justified before man through her works (Cf. Joshua 2:9-13).

— How did Rahab's faith demonstrate itself by works? She had faith that God was supreme, and would deliver the land of Canaan to the Israelites, including her city of Jericho. She put her belief into practice and took actions which matched her belief by saving the lives of the Israelite spies by hiding them, then sending them out of Jericho by another way, so that they wouldn't be captured. Her treatment of the Israelite spies manifested before men her complete trust in God.

— Imagine if Rahab, like the unhelpful believer in v15-17, merely wished the Israelite spies, "Good luck, hope you make it. I'm sure it will all work out" and then went about her business, doing nothing to shelter them or help them escape. The spies could've been captured and killed (unless God delivered them by another means), and Rahab and her family would've died as a result of her inaction (Cf. Joshua 2:17-21).

— As a result of her faith, she was placed into the lineage of David, and ultimately Jesus Christ. She is one of the few women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5).

- "...prostitute" - her profession prior to becoming a believer (Joshua 2:1; 6:17,22,25; Heb 11:31). The Hebrew word for "harlot" can have a wider meaning of "an innkeeper." However, the Greek word here and Heb 11:31 indicates an immoral person.

— Rahab was the complete opposite of Abraham, a respected prominent patriarch: she was a Gentile, a prostitute, and a comparatively minor figure in the OT.

- "...justified" - *dikaioō*, used in the same sense that James' used it in v24 regarding Abraham (Cf. Matt 12:37)

- "...received the messengers" - she welcomed and entertained her guests; she recognized the spies to be God's messengers to her and her family. Her faith in God led her to commit treason against her own people, the Canaanites of Jericho, in order to save the Israelite spies.

— Rahab likely had more confidence in the victory of the Israelites over her people, the Canaanites, than the Israelites had at that point in time.

[Joshua 2:9-13]

There's no doubt that Rahab was a believer, in the OT sense of the word, just like Abraham was in Gen 15:6. She was already justified (vertically) before God because she fulfilled the condition of faith alone. But when she stepped out and hid the spies, at risk to her own life, is when she was justified again (a 2nd time) before her fellow man (horizontally). The declaration of righteousness that she already possessed became practical.

Contrary to how Luther interpreted this passage, James is not saying that either Abraham or Rahab were made right with God through their good works. What James is saying is that both Abraham and Rahab were right with God before these events, through faith, but now their faith became a useful faith through their good works. When our faith becomes useful, it typically results in blessings for other people and the usefulness of our faith is vindicated in the eyes of others.

(e) Body and its spirit (2:26)

26 For just as the body without *the* spirit is **dead**, so also faith without works is **dead**.

26 For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without actions is also dead.

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

- To sum up his point since v14, James gives us a plain analogy, which is easily misunderstood without careful examination. The analogy is:

- Body without spirit = dead
- Faith without works = dead
- The body is analogous to faith; the spirit is analogous to works

— The analogy is of the body/spirit connection. The spirit animates or gives life to the body. Without the spirit, the body still exists, but it is lifeless.

— In the same way, faith (like a body) still exists without works, but it is lifeless. It isn't doing anything. It is dead. But you can still see and touch a lifeless body. It is still a body,

but it doesn't move, talk, think, interact, or engage.

— In the same way, a believer can have faith, but if their faith is not animated with works, their faith is not engaging or interacting. It is not bringing life to its surroundings.

— The application is that works animate, excite, and provide life for our faith. Faith by itself is lifeless, just like a spirit-less body, if there are no works. But when we believe and act, our faith grows. When we believe and fail to act, our faith atrophies into lifelessness.

— The response that James is looking for from his readers (and US!) is that we recognize that we were created and saved for good works, to bless others, by putting the commands of Christ into daily practice. Very similar to what he said earlier in 1:25:

25 But one who has looked intently at the perfect law, the *law* of freedom, and has continued *in it*, not having become a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this person will be blessed in what he does.

— The "forgetful hearer" is the person who says, "Be warmed and filled..." but does not help the cold, hungry man (Cf. v15-16).

- "...dead" [2x] - *nekros*, the word "dead" in Scripture always carries the idea of separation; synonyms include: useless, non-productive, good for nothing. Contrary to the 21st century definition, or what Reformed theologians say, the biblical definition of "dead" is never non-existence, but rather "separation" (see notes on v17).

— Physical death, biblically speaking, is when the soul and body are separated; the body goes into the ground, returning to dust, and the soul (of the Church Age believer) is immediately ushered into the presence of the Lord in heaven.

— What this verse is saying is that if I don't have works as a believer, my faith is dead, good for nothing, non-productive, separate from God's goals for saving me.

— James is saying that saving faith without accompanying works are separate from God's purpose/goal and profitless to mankind: your faith is separate from your works, meaning your works are not done in faith. You have a saving faith but not a serving faith.

— Faith and works must be joined, not separated, in order for our saving faith to become our serving faith

— James' entire purpose in this passage (v14-26) is not to give us evidence of whether faith exists based on works, but how that faith that every believer has can and should benefit both the possessor of the faith, along with other believers.

Paraphrase of James 2:14-26

Verses 15-17:

What benefit is there my brothers and sisters in Christ if one of you says he has faith but does not put works with it? Can that faith deliver him from anything?

If a brother or sister in Christ has no clothes and no food, and one of you says to them, "Have a good day; hope it works out for you," but you do not give them what they need for

their physical suffering, what good does it do?

Thus, faith when it sits alone and you do not put works with it, is useless and starts to wither.

Verses 18-20:

But someone might object to embracing such a responsibility. They might say: "Look, faith and works are two different things, and they don't have a relationship. You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith separate from your works (which you cannot do), and I'll show you my faith by my works (which I cannot do). See, they are not connected."

"Here, let me prove it to you. You believe that there is one true God, and your response is to do good things. But look, the demons also believe that too. But their response is just the opposite. They tremble in fear. So, there's my proof that there is no essential connection between faith and works."

Now I, James, say to any such objector: You are a foolish man for claiming there is no relationship between faith and works. Such a rationalization to dodge responsibility to help others is foolhardy. Faith and works are so related that faith without works is a dead-end.

Verses 21-24:

Do you want me to prove it? My proof is our earthly father Abraham, who grew to be righteous and showed it openly to others when he offered Isaac his son on the altar. He did this decades after he believed the promise of God and was justified in the sight of God. So you see that being justified in the sight of God comes only by faith (Gen 15:6) while being justified before others in this life requires actions that are consistent with faith.

So you can see that with Abraham, faith and works were cooperating and having such an impact together that we can say, "Works, when added to faith, makes our faith grow." In this story of Abraham, the righteousness of Abraham as stated in Gen 15:6, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" was a spiritual reality. But it was fulfilled when Abraham acted in faith by offering Isaac. Thus, we fulfill a spiritual reality when we live out that reality by faith.

And so when others saw this, they called Abraham God's friend. This is because they could see by Abraham's deeds that he was lined up (justified) with God's commands. So you can see that there is a further kind of justification, a justification before people as well as a justification before God. Abraham grew to be righteous by the good choices he made, and showed it outwardly in what he did. In this way we can say that Abraham did not stay at a place of "faith only," he matured.

Verse 25:

Rahab is the same type of example, in which her works were connected with her faith, and she was openly seen as a follower of God. Her faith was not dead, withering, or useless. Rather, it saved the lives of the messengers of Israel as she sent them out of the city by a secret way.

Verse 26:

Let me offer a final analogy to make this clear. When the physical body does not have a spirit, that body is lifeless, useless, and dead-though it still exists and was once alive, it is now dead. In the same way, if you know and believe God, but do not act on that faith in your daily Christian life, then your faith is also lifeless: it is useless, and it will wither.

10 Conclusions & Applications from James 2:14-26

1. It is possible to believe the gospel, hence be saved, yet not produce many, if any, visible good works.
2. But it is not possible to grow in the second tense of your salvation (sanctification, saved from the power of sin) without practicing what you believe, by faith.
3. Believers are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph 2:10).
4. Therefore, "good works" are both the production of divine good in the believer's life and a divine intent or goal of the new man, the new creation in Christ.
5. As a root produces fruit, so faith in Christ is to produce good works.
6. Faith is nourished and strengthened by good works; thus James says, "faith is brought to its goal by works (v22). There is a God-designed reciprocity between faith and good works.
7. Believers who verbalize the faith without following up with the production of good works are not Word doers (Cf. 1:22).
8. Believers who verbalize without being doers of the Word miss the saving/delivering qualities of God's design in good works. This reciprocity is expressed in v22.
9. Genuine believers do not produce good works at all times. There are lapses of good works with every believer throughout the course of their life. And there are even times that believers produce evil works. Therefore, to judge a person's salvation on the basis of his/her works (as Lordship Salvation does) is very dangerous and often misleading.
10. James and Paul are in complete agreement that faith in the forensic sense should result in good works, but a lack of good works is not necessarily cause to judge that one is saved or not. Who would judge that Lot was a saved man since all his recorded works were evil? Yet he was indeed justified/saved according to 2 Peter 2:6-7.

If you fail to see that James has two separate justifications in mind, you will forever have problems with this passage and miss a tremendous blessing and instruction in how to live the Christian life. James' primary concern is the works that other people see in us, which exhibit a faith that cannot be seen. As with Abraham, men could see that he was a justified man by his works, but these works had nothing to do with his actual justification before

God and eternal destiny. Abraham was declared justified by God on the basis of faith alone without one shred of good works.

Wrong interpretation of this passage (2:14-26) is a major contributor to the Lordship Salvation debate. See [Lordship Salvation](#) for a complete overview.

Lewis Sperry Chafer in his Systematic Theology work provides four ideas of faith found in the Bible:

*In its larger usage, the word faith represents at least four varied ideas: (1) As above, it can be personal confidence in God. This the most common aspect of faith may be subdivided into three features: (a) **Saving faith**, which is the inwrought confidence in God's promises and provisions respecting the Savior that leads one to elect to repose upon and trust in the One who alone can save; (b) **Serving faith**, which contemplates as true the fact of divinely bestowed gifts and all details respecting divine appointments for service. This faith is always a personal matter, and so one believer should not become a pattern for another. That such faith with its personal characteristic may be kept inviolate the apostle writes: "Hast thou faith? hae it to thyself before God" (Rom 14:22). Great injury may be wrought if one Christian imitates another in matters of appointment for service; (c) **Sanctifying or sustaining faith**, which lays hold of the power of God for one's daily life. It is the life lived in dependence upon God, working upon a new life-principle (Rom 6:4). The justified one, having become what he is by faith, must go ahead living on the same principle of utter dependence upon God.*