

James 2:14-26

"Functional Faith"

Faith is an essential element of the Christian life. As believers it's one of the foundational, fundamental layers upon which we *build* our lives. In many ways it encompasses the *whole* of our lives. It's through *faith* that we're saved (Eph 2:8-9); the bible teaches us that we walk by faith (not by sight [2 Cor 5:7]), that w/out faith it's impossible to please God (Heb 11:6) & that *whatever* we do apart from faith is sin (Rom 14:23).

Of course the problem that presents itself to people is that there is more than one kind of faith that a person might have. The wrong kind of faith will give you a false sense of confidence, but not save your soul. That's why Peter put it out there, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure,"¹ Paul said, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves."² Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven,"³ You see, you & me, we need to know that we know that we're headed for heaven. When it comes to salvation, that's one area that we really don't have the luxury of leaving in the gray; "Maybe I'm saved, maybe I'm not, I'm not real sure I guess I'll figure it out when I get there..." Hey, hold on there; (time out, flag on the field) let's think this thing through... 😊

You see the question we need to consider is, "What kind of faith (specifically) is 'saving' faith?" "How can I tell if my faith is the genuine article, or I've bought into the counterfeit?" "How are we able to discern whether or not a particular individual (ourselves included) is exercising true saving faith?" In short, it has to do w/how faith functions in our lives, or is your faith functioning at all?

Unfortunately there are people all over this planet who believe that they're headed for heaven under the misguided notion (or false sense of assurance) that because they believe in God that's all they really need. & You hear that kind of thing all the time, "Hey man, I believe in God". But James takes the time to make it clear, "That's not enough". We need to know what salvation looks like in real time, how it's displayed in a person's life.

James points out here in this portion of scripture before us that there are at least 3 types of faith that a person might have. The problem is that only one of them is the kind of faith that will save your soul. There is what we might call a "Dead Faith", a "Demonic Faith" & a "Dynamic Faith". Now guess which one needs to be at work in us? The 1st 2 will deceive you; it's the 3rd one that will deliver you.

¹ The New King James Version. 1982 [2 Pe 1:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² The New King James Version. 1982 [2 Co 13:5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ The New King James Version. 1982 [Mt 7:21]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In the previous section of scripture James talked about *accepting* others, in our present section of scripture he talks about *aiding* others; the previous being a demonstration of love, the present being a demonstration of faith; notice.

Vs 14

Back in Vs 12 the exhortation came to let our talk & our walk be as one. “So speak, & so do...” Here James poses the question, “If you’ve got the talk, but you don’t have the walk, is the talk valid?” “If you say you have faith, but you don’t have any works, can that kind of faith save you?” You see, *defending* the faith is one thing (having spiritual *words* at your disposal), but *demonstrating* the faith (having real time good works on display in your life) is another thing altogether.

James says, “What good is it to say you have faith if it doesn’t function in any practical way in your life?” He says, “Can the kind of faith that doesn’t change your life, save your soul?” The answer is, “No”. **He’s asking a rhetorical question (the answer is implied in the phrasing of the question) Can the kind of faith that produces no works in a person’s life save that person? The answer is “no, it cannot”.**

This is the kind of faith that we might refer to as a “dead” faith. It makes no difference *in* your life, does nothing to bring change *to* your life. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians he said, **“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”**⁴ That is, unless your belief in the gospel was pointless, did nothing *for* you, made no difference *in* you.

You see the problem w/the altar call today (which we really don’t find in the bible btw) is that it can give someone a false sense of assurance as though because I prayed a prayer, or walked down an aisle (or whatever) I went through the motions, now I must be **ok w/God**. But you can “believe in vain”. Meaning, you can make a profession, say the right words, but if you go out these doors & revert back to the same lifestyle you’ve always known, than simply praying a prayer *meant* nothing *to* you & it *did* nothing *for* you...

Saving faith is a “functional faith”, that’s what James is seeking to stress here. Chuck Swindoll said it like this: “Faith is like calories; you can’t see them, but you can always see their results!” Even so I can’t see your faith, but I should certainly be able to see the results of your faith through the way you lead your life...

⁴ The New King James Version. 1982 [1 Co 15:1-2], Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

One has said that a *workless* faith is a *worthless* faith. Profession apart from performance is pointless. What's the point of having a driver's license if you never drive? What difference did it make in your life? None whatsoever. **Even so, to carry around a "Christian I.D." that makes no difference in your life is like having a license but never driving, it won't help you at all. Just being in church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than being in a garage makes you a car. It's not *where* you are nor what you *say* so much as it is *who* you are & what you *do*.**

You see, what makes an apple tree an apple tree is the fact that it brings forth apples. If it brought forth pears it would be a "pear tree." Even so Jesus said in regard to a genuine believer Vs a false profession of faith, **"You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."**⁵ So as for the question, "Can I have faith but not have works?" James ends the debate, "No, you can't."

If your faith has not made an ongoing difference in your life practically, it has done nothing for you eternally. Leave the book of James (turn to the right) & look at **1 John Ch 3** (Vs 16-19). **So you see what we believe is displayed in how we behave, not in what we say, but in what we show. We don't love one another in word or tongue (though kind words are certainly part of it), but the primary display is in deed & in truth, not in words, but in works.**

There's a lot of "Zombie Life" in the church today, people walking around as if they're alive, but in reality they're dead, faith is not really functioning in any way in their lives. Authentic faith is an active faith...Notice.

Vs 15-17

You see, saving faith won't be indifferent, it'll get involved. Now we should be quick to recognize a genuine need Vs someone seeking to take advantage of the system. James isn't in anyway seeking to imply that when someone comes to you w/a sad story, or you see someone w/a cardboard sign standing on the street corner that you should automatically stop & give them money. We live in a wealthy society (even in this difficult economic era), most of us probably aren't accustomed to even seeing the kind of abject poverty that James is speaking of here much less knowing of anyone truly living in it.

⁵ The New King James Version. 1982 [Mt 7:16-20] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So how can we balance it out? What are we looking for in able to discern a genuine need Vs someone looking for a hand out &/or seeking to manipulate your emotions for their own gain? Turn 1 more time to **2 Thess Ch 3** (6-13)

There are going to be people who seek to take advantage of you, but don't let that discourage you from desiring to do good to people. If they aren't willing to work, come to you w/a sense of entitlement, give you a sad story & then get mad when you seek to discern what's going on there, than you're probably safe to save your money.

But to the man who's seeking work diligently, is seeking to manage any resources he may have w/wisdom & integrity, isn't always looking for something for nothing, but simply isn't able to make ends meet, if we're able to be there for them we want to be there for them.

How many of us know what it's like to be on the end of empty spiritual platitudes instead of real help? "Hey man, have faith!" "Hey, I'll be prayin for ya!" Now, in reality that's great if you really mean it, but too often it's a smoke screen for (I'm not going to do anything to help you). Faith will go beyond words, it'll reach out to the truly needy.

James is saying that for the one in dire need of the basic necessities of life, simple sentimental wishes & a few religious words aren't much help. You see sometimes when a real need arises we should *pray* less & *do* more. In Vs 14 he begins, "What good is it?" & In Vs 16 he ends, "What good is it?" The idea there being, "It's not *any* good." That kind of faith (Vs 17) is dead. No help to no one, not even the one in whom it resides.

Now the concept of faith being fruitful/functional, or works being the evidence of truly trusting God isn't new &/or novel to James. J.B. (Matt 3:8) taught that men ought to prove the reality of their repentance by the excellence of their deeds (bearing fruits worthy of repentance). Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."⁶ Paul the apostle said, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."⁷ So faith & good works are like a marriage relationship, the two are one, there's no real way to separate them as far as God is concerned.

A workless faith is a worthless faith, it's a dead faith & as such it's deceitful. It gives one a false sense of assurance but in the end does nothing to save their soul.

Vs 18-19

⁶ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Mt 5:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ga 6:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He creates an argument/debate for the sake of emphasis. He portrays two people debating the difference, “You have faith, I have works” as if they’re spiritual gifts or something... Saying that some have the gift of works is like saying that some have the gift of breathing. Listen, if we’re alive it’s something indigenous to us all. Even so if your faith is genuine/living saving faith, works will simply be indigenous to that.

How does one demonstrate faith apart from works? You can’t, he says “Go ahead, show me your faith (James must’ve been from MO ☺) w/out your works & I’ll show you my faith *by* my works.” You see, saving faith isn’t invisible, it’s on display. Saving faith is demonstrated by what we show, not by what we say.

Now check it out. He says, “You believe in one God, that’s awesome... so do the demons...& they *tremble*, they shudder! They fear God!” Which is more than can be said for most people who claim to believe in God. Sometimes it shocks people to realize that demons have faith, demons believe in God. **This simply adds to James point that to simply believe in God doesn’t save your soul. How does James demonstrate that demonic faith doesn’t save? Because it makes no difference in their behavior, it’s not followed up w/good works, they continue in destructive works, deceitful works.**

Demons are impacted not only intellectually (they believe in God), but emotionally as well (they tremble). Just having good theology & being stirred emotionally (cried on Sunday morning, said a prayer) that won’t save you. The final proof will be in the fruit that then comes forth *from* you.

Read the gospels; the demons believe in the existence of God (they’re not atheistic nor agnostic), they believe in the deity of Jesus, in an eternal place of torment, they recognize J.C. as the Judge, they submit to the Word of His power, but they’re not saved... A person can be enlightened in his mind, stirred in his heart & still be lost forever. The issue isn’t believing that God is real, it’s in making Jesus your Savior, that will be made evident in the fruit of a person’s life...

Vs 20-24

So James goes all the way back to the “father of faith” to underscore his point; the patriarch Abraham. It’s found in Gen Ch 15 whereby God comes to Abe in a vision & says, “Don’t be afraid Abram, I am your shield & your exceedingly great reward.” Abe is all, “What will You give me, seeing I go childless; I have no heir other than my servant Eliezer?” God says, “Eliezer isn’t going to be your heir. Go outside & look up toward heaven.”

So Abe goes outside & looks up. God says, "If you can count the stars in the sky you can # your descendants that will come forth from your body." And we read there that Abe believed God & it was accounted to him for righteousness. But the question comes up, how do we *know* that Abe believed God?

Flash forward a # of years, Abe is now 100 yrs old; the miracle of miracles Sarah (being 90) conceives & gives birth to a son, Isaac. Now God had told Abe (Gen 12) that in him (that is, through his descendants) all of the families of the earth would be blessed (meaning Messiah would come forth from his body).

Ok, flash forward again. Abe is beyond old (perhaps 130 or so), the word of the Lord comes to him (Gen 22), "Take now your son, your only son Isaac whom you love to the land of Moriah & offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the Mts of which I will show you..." Now Abe only had 1 son, (oh there was Ishmael, but he was the product of Abe's flesh, not God's promise, Isaac was the one through whom God had promised would come the blessing).

Here's the short of the otherwise long story, God stopped Abe from sacrificing his son whom he loved (of course we would see in that a type of our heavenly Father offering His only begotten Son whom *He* loved for the sin of the world & as to where Isaac was spared Christ was not). Be that as it may, Abe raised that knife & was prepared to thrust it into the heart of his child, why? Because he didn't care if Isaac died? Far from it, because he *believed the word of God* that God would bring forth a nation from Isaac & if it took God raising Isaac from the dead to do that, Abe trusted God to do just that. Heb 11, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." ⁸ So you see, his faith was "made perfect" (that is brought into full evident fruition) not because of what Abe *said* (I believe), but because of what Abe *showed*. The *work*, backed up his *word*.

Vs 24

Now this is where people think that Paul & James were at odds w/each other. Because Paul championed justification by faith alone. Leave James one final time & lets look together & Romans 4 (Vs 1-5)

⁸ The New King James Version, 1982 (Heb 11:17-19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So using the same exact scripture reference, Paul demonstrates that Abe was justified by faith. Yet James says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” So what gives? Do these guys contradict each other? Not at all.

Now we could take the time to really develop what’s going on here but I think you’ll understand when I simply say to you that Paul was speaking about the root of salvation as to where James is speaking about the fruit of salvation. When it comes to being made righteous in the sight of God, it’s by grace that we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast, right (Eph 2:8-9)?

So as it pertains to salvation at its root, it is faith in Christ & Christ alone. It’s not faith + baptism, faith + bible reading, faith + knocking on doors, or witnessing or anything else. Works having nothing to do w/the root of salvation. We’re saved through faith in Christ alone, the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to save us, believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved... However, as it pertains to *fruit* of salvation, the functioning of our faith, it will be made manifest through good works in our lives.

Paul the apostle readily affirmed that over & over again. Even in Eph Ch 2 Vs 10. We often stop at Vs 9... “not of works lest any man should boast.” But what does Vs 10 say?

*“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*⁹ Titus Ch 3, *“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.”*¹⁰ Gal Ch 5, *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”*¹¹

So God sees the heart, He knows when you’re faith is genuine, we know your faith is genuine by the works that are made manifest in your life, saving faith is a functional faith, it will change your life in an ongoing kind of way. Where there’s not fruit, there’s no root (that’s what Jesus taught in the parable of the sower/soils [Mark 4]). God sees your faith, man sees your works.

Ok, James envisions his reader saying something to the effect of, “Well, C’mon James. Abe is a rather “lofty” example don’t ya think? He’s out patriarchal father!” “Ok, James says, than let’s consider a “lowly” example, how does a pagan prostitute hit ya?” Notice.

Vs 25-26

Be you the patriarchal father, or a pagan prostitute, saving faith is evidenced the same way, not by what you say, but through what you do...

⁹ The New King James Version. 1982 (Eph 2:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰ The New King James Version. 1982 (Tit 3:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹¹ The New King James Version. 1982 (Gal 5:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Be you moral, or immoral, man, woman, Jew or Gentile, your belief will be displayed in how you behave. You might write it down & look it up later, Joshua Ch 2.

The children of Israel preparing to take the Promised Land & Jericho is 1st on the horizon. Joshua sends in some spies & they head into Rahab's place (I presume because it wouldn't be uncommon to see strangers coming in & out at her house).

The king catches wind that spies are there, sends some armed forces to say, "Bring those men out". She's all, "Well, they came here but they already left." When the soldiers left, she brings them out, tells them how to leave w/out being caught & declares her belief in the God of Israel. *She'd heard of all that he'd done, delivering them from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the destruction of the Amalekites, the whole thing. (Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God). & She believed God was going to give them Jericho, so she asked them to spare her & her family & saw to it that they escaped. What she believed was displayed in how she behaved.*

To keep it brief she wound up in the lineage of J.C. Himself (Matt 1:5). She married Salmon (perhaps one of the spies?), who by her had Boaz, Boaz through Ruth had Obed, & Obed begot Jesse who begot... (any guesses) king David... Now who is Jesus often referred to as? "The Son of David." Rahab (the pagan prostitute) entered into the lineage of J.C.

Here's the point, both Abe & Rahab *did something that gave evidence of what they believed. They didn't sit idly by & rejoice in God's goodness, they put feet to their faith, they had functional faith.* So listen, dead faith only touches the intellect, demonic faith will grab both the intellect & the emotions, but dynamic faith *engages the will*, it grabs all 3. The whole being; the mind *understands* the truth, the heart desires & is moved by the truth, the will responds & acts *upon* the truth.

What does Abe teach us here? If we believe in God, we'll do what He tells us to. What does Rahab teach us here? That if believe in God, we'll help His people, be it even at our own expense.

Vs 26

As the spirit is to a man (life) so works are to faith (life). Faith that has no works is unable to save. Time for an honest evaluation: is your faith dead, at best demonic, or is it dynamic? *Understanding* the truth, desiring & hungering *for* the truth, responding & acting *upon* the truth...

Prayer points:

Lord this is where we say, "Search me, O Lord, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24).

God we don't want to be deceived & lulled into a false sense of assurance when it comes to the faith that we have in You. So we ask You to make it evident, wake us up & move us; stir us to good works, practical helps, that we be fruitful in our faith toward You. We desire that our talk & our walk be as one; that our light so shine that people see our good works & glorify You... & we'll give you praise.

If you don't have that certainty, (I'm not trying to manipulate you emotionally) you know that what you profess & what you practice doesn't line up. Or perhaps you've simply never professed to begin with. If you need Christ to come into your life, forgive you of your sin & make you new than today I invite you to surrender your mind, surrender your heart, & surrender your will to J.C. Believe on the Lord J.C. & so be saved.