

"Practical Christianity"

If there is **A PASSAGE THAT FULLY EMBODIES THE THEME OF OUR STUDY** in James, it's the one we're studying tonight.

We've seen SPECIFIC INSTANCES of what living out the Word looks like. We've hit...

- enduring in the midst of trials,
- faithfully relying on God's wisdom,
- a biblical perspective on wealth,
- overcoming sinful anger,
- exposing favoritism,
- and living in love.

However, tonight's passage is more of an **overarching treatise on working out one's faith.**

The church sign has read that tonight's lesson is on **Faith VERSUS Works**, but these ideas aren't opposed; they actually work in concert. So, to clarify that title, we're talking about **"Intellectual Faith VS A Faith that Works."**

James 2:14

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

Upon initial inspection, this passage seems to be teaching that good **WORKS ARE ADDITIONALLY REQUIRED FOR SALVATION.**

Because this is a **DIFFICULT PASSAGE**, we must turn to other relevant passages for clarification.

SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE.

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Works have no saving merit before God. God does the rescuing; we get rescued. That's it.

Picture being on the third floor of a building in flames. Black smoke is choking you. Flames pool on the ceiling. Now portions of ceiling begin falling in. You have no way out.

Then the smoke begins to stir. There's a breeze. A beam of light swings across the room. There's a window! And there's someone outside it! A fireman is standing on a ladder, motioning you to come.

"Come this way! Hurry! Come with me! I can help you!"

You make your way through the window into the arms of the fireman, and he escorts you to safety.

Did the person who was rescued respond to the rescuer? YES!

So, did that person save himself in any way? NO!

What would've happened to the person in danger if he hadn't responded to the rescuer's offer of help? He would have perished!

A response was necessary to be rescued, but that response doesn't constitute being active in one's own rescue. **Credit for the rescue lies squarely on the shoulders of the rescuer.**

If the fireman hadn't offered to rescue, there would have been no rescue opportunity to respond to; had God not initiated the rescue by sending Jesus to die for sin, there would have been no opportunity of salvation to respond to.

Jesus' death on the cross was for everyone; however, not everyone responds in REPENTANCE and FAITH. In other words, Jesus' death was SUFFICIENT to pay for all sin (1 John 2:2) but only EFFICIENT for those who believe (Romans 10:13).

REPENTANCE (*met-an'-oy-ah*) - **a change of mind**, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done

REPENT (*met-an-o-eh'-o*)

1) to change one's mind, i.e. to repent

2) to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence

of one's past sins

The CHANGE central to REPENTANCE has to do with the MIND, RESULTING IN A CHANGE OF ACTION.

For the lost person, it's a NEW WAY OF THINKING, realizing that the things the Bible says is sin IS SIN, that SIN CONDEMNS ONE TO HELL, and that, in our sin, WE CAN'T FIX IT (through any good work).

True repentance is then followed by FAITH, TOTAL DEPENDENCE ON SOMEONE ELSE (*pis'-tis* in the Greek).

For the saved person, repentance still happens as part of the sanctification process (and it is a *PROCESS*, not an *EVENT*). A growing believer is taught how to live by the Word and the Spirit, bringing about change leading to greater conformity to the image of God's Son.

Again, works do not save, and repentance isn't a work! Repentance is the CHANGE OF MIND that leads to a change of action. To emphasize the action is to potentially put the cart before the horse in someone's heart as he or she searches for salvation, and that happens all the time...

Walking an aisle...

Praying a prayer...

Shaking a preacher's hand...

Getting baptized...

"Regularly attending church..."

"Giving..."

"Teaching Sunday school..."

And because someone does those things, well, they must be saved, right? Nope.

It doesn't work that way. We bring NOTHING to the table that merits salvation.

Isaiah 64:6

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

It isn't CEASING TO SWEAR to get saved. It isn't CEASING SEXUAL SIN or GOING TO CHURCH to get into heaven. It isn't changing to be saved; it's changing because of being saved.

A few weeks ago, I was blown away by an article I read about a Freedom March and the LGBTQ community in Orlando.



The beautiful thing about it is that it was a march celebrating freedom *FROM* the LGBTQ lifestyle.



It was hosted by Angel Colon, and Luis Javier Ruiz. Both men are survivors of the Pulse Night Club shooting in Orlando, FL three years ago, and have since left homosexuality.

You can find the article on the Christian Post website among others. It's a powerful.

At the event and as part of his ministry called Fearless Identity, Ruiz is known for making this declaration: "It's not a gay to straight thing, it's a lost to saved thing."

I love the boldness and clarity of that statement.

That's the picture of what James is talking about.

Dr. Norman Geisler concisely stated, "***We do not work in order to obtain salvation; we work because we have already been given it.***"

Life change isn't expected in order to obtain salvation; it's expected as a **RESULT of receiving salvation.**

James 2:15-17

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

ILLUSTRATION 1: Seeing a need without meeting it

This example comes by way of **Deuteronomy 15:7-8...**

7 If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, 8 but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

This was the LAW! Therefore, to not show hospitality to those in need was to break the law. **This would have definitely dug into the formerly Jewish audience to whom James was writing.**

"faith by itself..."

This is that **INTELLECTUAL FAITH** we started off talking about. It's "believing that" instead of "believing in," if you will. It's mental assent to doctrine, not the appropriation of said doctrine to one's life.

James is saying that if there is **NO OUTWARD EFFECT** caused by your faith it's useless? No, worthless? No, **DEAD!** The Greek word translated *dead* is literally used to describe something that's **LIFELESS** or even **INANIMATE**.

James 2:18

But someone will say, You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Applying quotation marks in this passage, determining specifically where the quote ends and James' admonition begins is difficult. Most scholars, however, conclude the quote

at "You have faith and I have works," as if the dissenter is saying, "Don't expect everyone to have both."

ARGUMENT AGAINST WORKS: Internal faith can exist without the presence of external works.

It's that vague, self-righteous answer, "My faith is **PERSONAL**," or "My faith is **PRIVATE**," given when someone is investigating whether someone knows Jesus. If you've heard such an answer when witnessing to folks, you know that the conversation doesn't get much further after that.

It's what the leftist culture tells US about how **OUR BELIEFS** should have NO PLACE in the PUBLIC FORUM.

No place in **POLITICS** or **GOVERNMENT**.

No place in **PUBLIC SCHOOLS**.

No place in the realm of **BUSINESS** or **ECONOMY**.

But that's COSMIC THINKING! Jesus, on the other hand, modeled the opposite. Did he gather His disciples secretly to teach them, or remain only in the Temple and homes? NO! He was in the marketplace, the streets, the fields, EVERYWHERE!

And He calls for His teaching to be lived in public too.

James states that the claim that **INTELLECTUAL FAITH IS REAL CANNOT BE SUBSTANTIATED**. James, however, can show that he acts in cooperation with his faith.

James' basic apologetic for faith and works goes something like, "Try proving the reality of your invisible faith without any physical outworking. Go on."

WORKS are the **EVIDENCE** of **FAITH**.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Colossians 3:10

and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Others can tell that the old, *natural* self has passed away **BY HOW ONE BEHAVES**. There's a **CHANGE!**

We'll come back to how our **NEW NATURE** affects our **SANCTIFICATION**.

James 2:19

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

James continues his argument against **INTELLECTUAL FAITH...**

“It’s great that you know as much as the demons.” The demons know there’s only one God, and yet they don’t act on those beliefs; **they don’t honor him as God.**

Intellectual faith, or **HEAD KNOWLEDGE**, is not saving faith.

OLD TESTAMENT ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE: TWO examples from JEWISH HISTORY

Abraham and Isaac

James 2:20-24

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture

was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness—and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Without faith, we would not have acted in **OBEDIENCE**. When James says that faith is "completed" by works, he's talking about **REACHING THE END, THE GOAL**, which is obedience, **A LIFE THAT POINTS TO GOD**.

Jesus said the same thing in **Matthew 5:16...**

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

When we live out God's will, the world experiences God, and GIVES HIM GLORY!

Because of his faith, Abraham was able to give up EVERYTHING for the Lord, knowing that He would take care of him as he trusted and obeyed.

While Abraham struggled from time to time, I refer to this moment in his life as **A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF FAITH** because (in his heart) he went all the way through with it.

The Lord had to stop him at the last second, and because Hebrews records that he had (as a type) received his son BACK FROM THE DEAD, that means that **he had already sacrificed Isaac in his heart.**

Rahab (IMPERFECT EXAMPLE)

James 2:25

And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Like Abraham, Rahab the prostitute demonstrated her faith in the Lord by protecting the spies of His people, Israel.

Joshua 2:8-9

8 Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof 9 and said to the men, I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

She knew **the Lord was God and that He was the One who would determine the fate of Jericho**, and more specifically, the fate of her own family. Therefore, **she acted according to her faith.**

However, as I've stated, her actions weren't perfect...

Joshua 2:3-6

Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land. 4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5 And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them. 6 But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof.

SHE LIED FOR THE LORD! Am I the only one to whom that sounds crazy?

Did the Lord need her to lie for His plan to be successful? No!

Was her lie a part of His divine plan? Was God relying on sin for success? NO!

She could have defied the king of Jericho and told him to **TRY AND TAKE THEM!** The Lord's death angel could have swooped in just like in Egypt on the first Passover and taken out every single person in Jericho, sparing Rahab and her family.

The Lord could have obliterated Jericho like Sodom and Gomorrah. Joshua would have met the spies with Rahab and her family as they walked away from **A CRATOR!**

BUT RAHAB WASN'T AT THAT POINT YET! The threat of harm to herself and her family was deadly real if it were found that she had aided the enemy. She would help these servants of the Lord, but would the Lord show Himself mighty on behalf of a prostitute and her family? Would He protect them?

When Rahab stood with the Lord, she stood with the Victor, but perhaps out of fear, perhaps out of uncertainty or doubt, **she felt the need to protect herself through a lie.**

Why do I stress that her faith was imperfect? **Because ours will be sometimes.**

SANCTIFICATION is not an event; it's a process. It isn't automatic; it's a *NATURAL* progression.

Romans 6:16

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Pay attention to how **obedience is called for** on the part of believers. If sanctification was an event, and you automatically demonstrated good works, obedience wouldn't be called for.

2 Corinthians 8:3

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,

Note again **the element of free will.**

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

And here, **the challenge is to love God.** If that quality didn't require cultivation, believers wouldn't be challenged to act so.

I appreciate **James' juxtaposition** of these two figures and the faithful acts upon which he calls readers to reflect.

Abraham unwaveringly and unflinchingly obeyed in faith. Rahab responded to God as faithfully as she could.

It's a spectrum of working faith, **along which we *WILL* find ourselves if we have truly trusted Jesus as Savior.**

James 2:26

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Works are the “life” of faith.

You either have an intellectual faith—a faith that knows about God and what He did for you—or you have a *WORKING FAITH*.

A WORKING FAITH doesn't perform good deeds to merit salvation; it rests fully in Jesus' saving act on the cross. The works of such a faith are **the natural outworking of the salvation that you hold.**

If your faith isn't apparent by the way you live, it isn't real.

And if your faith is real, it will *NATURALLY* change your life.

And like anything that grows to produce fruit, our faith must be cultivated—through time spent in the Word, being taught at the Lord's feet, and through obedience to His teaching.

Colossians 2:6-7

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,

How did you receive Christ Jesus? By going to church? By getting baptized? No, by FAITH!

"Walk in Him!" We talked about this "worthy walk" on Sunday, and the life to which it refers. Live your life according to your faith in the One who saved you.

Lastly, I want to point out that this passage IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWS James citation of the Royal Law! Loving God is CENTRAL to the application of this passage.

James 2:8

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well.

What is the royal law? Love the Lord you God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (and love your neighbor as yourself—what verses 15 through 17 was talking about).

Norman Wirzba, Contributor to Huffington Post (crazy!)

Professor of Theology and Ecology at Duke University

"Jesus does not call people to the cozy confines of the home or church. He calls them to go out into the world to share love rather than hate, and to practice humility and mercy rather than arrogance and belligerence. Faith is a personal and a public thing. It is the kind of thing that can be judged by the kind and quality of its fruit, which is why Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). If love is absent, someone other than Jesus is being followed."

"Is Christian Faith a Private Matter?"

Growing in our love for God **HELPS US WANT TO OBEY HIM**, walking in faith, and giving Him the right to change us.

1 John 5:3

**For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.
And his commandments are not burdensome.**

There are people in our lives whom we love, and we live and interact with them in such a way that will please them because of that love. If we LOVE Jesus, we will WANT TO live in such a way that pleases Him.

My mentor would end such a lesson saying, ***"It's time to fall in love with Jesus all over again."***

Let's love Him and live for Him.