

# James' Letter

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## 4: Genuine Faith

We now move into the second main teaching of James' letter where he points out that true faith leads to a life of obedience to God and good works towards others. He begins this teaching with the pressing question:

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” (2:14)

This question presented by James is one that has ignited heated debates for centuries throughout church history, but a proper understanding of what James is intending to say here proves to be less controversial than it first seems.

### Declaring You Have Faith in Jesus

James is addressing a type of faith that has nothing to back up its validity except the person's profession of it. It is like a person going through life claiming that they are a follower of Jesus simply because they say they believe in God and Jesus. However, as James attempts to point out here in this passage, a faith that doesn't do anything that would be descriptive of true saving faith in Scripture is nothing more than hot air that brings no benefit or blessing to anyone.

James makes his case by basically saying,

“I have faith in Jesus, and I can prove it. You claim to also have this same faith in Jesus, but can you prove it? How can you be so sure that you possess something of which there is no evidence for it in your life?”

Jesus often compared His followers to fruit trees by pointing out that you can't claim to be a fruit tree and yet never produce any fruit. And so the implication is clear, you cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus and yet live a life that looks nothing like the way Jesus lived His here on earth.

## Declaring You Believe in God

James goes on to address the issue of assuming belief in God is enough. When we think of believing in Jesus, most of us think of the following:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

This is the summary statement of the gospel with an astounding description of God's love for man and a beautiful promise to those who love Him back. This is perhaps one of the most awesome sentences in all of Scripture. However, I often fear that this summary statement made by Jesus has been hijacked at times to promote a distorted message — one that highlights the act of believing with no mention of entrusting, surrender, or commitment.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:16

Mere intellectual assent of proper knowledge concerning Christ does not make us right with God. James points out that even the demons possess the proper knowledge concerning Christ! This ought to be obvious to us, but I fear that many people rest falsely assured of their salvation simply because they believe certain Biblical stories to be true.

***Following Jesus is more than believing He should be followed.***

Imagine you are out in the middle of the ocean being tossed around by the waves and fighting to stay afloat in order to survive. Then out of nowhere a rescue boat pulls up and tosses you a rescue ring so they can pull you in. Believing that the rescue ring can save you from drowning is not enough to actually be saved from drowning. Salvation will not be experienced until you grab a hold of that ring and cling to it with everything you got all the way back to the boat.

Is it much different with Jesus?

A lesson in the original Greek would have my back here. To *believe* means *to place full confidence in* or *to entrust your life to*. It signifies a reliance upon something or someone; not a mere belief or acceptance of something as true. Therefore, it would help us to interpret this popular verse like this, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever embraces Him and entrusts their lives to Him should not perish but have eternal life."

***Following Jesus is more than believing He should be followed.***

We must recognize that we need to be rescued from the sin curse and our sinful condition, and we must cling to Christ (His life, teaching and example) as our rescue ring and our only Way back to the safe shores of eternal life.

## Doing What Our King Says

At the end of His most famous teaching, Jesus declared that:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”<sup>2</sup>

And then He ends with this graphic illustration:

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> see Matthew 7:21

<sup>3</sup> see Matthew 7:24-27

We may believe that Jesus is King, but if we do not do what He has said to do then that belief is just empty words. And like the example that James gives in this teaching, we may believe that God provides for those in need, but if we do nothing to provide for them then our faith is useless.

We may be genuine in our desire to be a follower of Jesus, but our problem usually lies in our desire to still want to do life our way. We want what following Jesus may give us, but we want to continue steering the wheel.

James and Jesus warn us in their teaching that you can intellectually agree and believe in your heart that Jesus is King and yet not live your life as if He were.

How many men professing the Christian faith might find themselves guilty of studying, admiring, discussing, debating and praising the Word of God but yet not actually doing the things that our King has commanded us to do?

***Faith without obedience is dead. It means nothing to call Jesus 'Lord' if we are not willing to do what He has commanded us to do.***