

James 2:14-26
“Making My Life Make a Difference”
March 22, 2026

When we interpret any Bible passage, the lens through which we see the passage will determine our final analysis of what the passage means. Some passages, when taken as stand-alone entities, will appear to say something entirely different than when the passage is interpreted in light of the remainder of the book in which it occurs. **James Ch 2** is no exception to this principle. We must keep in mind that James is written to believers about living out our Christian conversion.

V 14 “...Can faith save him?” The *traditional view* sees James referring to salvation from hell, and if that is the case, then there are different types of faith, and you must have the faith that works in order to go to heaven. Some common ideas spring from this interpretation: “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone;” “Faith without works is ‘demon faith,’ and they’re not saved, so you might not be either;” “Faith without works cannot be called faith...Faith must be there, but it must be more.” But, is this not re-defining the word “faith”? Also, most translations render the article “the” in front of “faith” as a demonstrative pronoun (“that;” “such”) in support of that particular viewpoint.

The *temporal deliverance view* sees James using “save” in the sense of saving your life here and now, from the devastating effects of sin and uselessness, and him saying that faith alone cannot do that. This view fits with James’s use of the word “save (Gr *sozo*)” in general (**1:21; 4:12; 5:15; 5:20**).

Vv 15,16 The context is about profitability, or usefulness. If our faith stays on the inside, and does not produce good works, then it is useless for the benefit of those around us.

V 17 Faith without works is dead, in contrast to the potential of receiving “with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (Gr *psyche*; lives). At stake is life or death, literally, for the believer.

Vv 18-19 Here James uses the *diatribe*, a common rhetorical device, wherein a detractor makes a ridiculous point, to set up an opportunity to make a counter-point. We have to supply the quotation marks, since they aren’t in the manuscripts. This quote probably goes through the end of **v 19**, because **v 20** begins the answer to the detractor.

If that be the case, then the detractor is saying we can prove our faith without works, and we can prove our faith with works; there is no unique superiority to either. As an example, we accept the faith of demons, without seeing any good works from them.

V 20 James answers the objector that faith without works is useless. James is making an emphatic point that works are 100% necessary for salvation (of the life).

V 21-23 Abraham offered Isaac on the altar (**Genesis 22:10**), and by this we know that he believed what he said he believed. He became justified *in our eyes*. This happened at least 20 years after “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (**Genesis 15:6**). It took at least two decades for his faith to be perfected to the point of all of us agreeing that his conversion was real.

“And he was called the friend of God.” See **John 15:14**; we are in relationship with a Heavenly Father, and we can obey Him and be His “friend” and live a life of blessing, or we can ignore His instruction and lose our lives.

V 24 “only” Gr *monos*, adverb that modifies “justified.” To render the word as “alone” and use it to modify “faith” is inserting a theological viewpoint into the translation.

James certainly appears to be saying that there are two justifications, one by faith (before God), and one by works (before men). Faith alone cannot save us before men.

V 25 In **Hebrews 11:31**, Rahab the harlot is credited with having faith when she “received the spies with peace.” In James, she “sent them out another way.” It was her works that justified her in our eyes (temporal salvation); it was her faith that justified her in God’s eyes (eternal salvation).

V 26 As the spirit animates the body and gives it energy for usefulness, so do works animate the faith and give it usefulness as well.