



Date: 08-03-2025

Sermon Title: From Death to Life

Text: James 2.14-26 NLT

Anchor Verse:

James 1:7- 8 NLT

“For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

James 2:14–26 NLT

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.” You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless? Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him

as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone. Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

Define Terms:

Faith

*“Let us define faith. Our English word “faith” as found in the New Testament is the translation for the Greek noun *pístis*, which is often defined as firm persuasion, conviction, or trust. The noun form *pístis* comes from the verb *peithō*, which is translated as believe, have confidence, persuade, trust, or obey.”*

The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 34: James / 1 & 2 Peter / Jude How to Make Faith Work

_____ faith must include works.

James 2:14 NLT

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?

James 2:20 NLT

How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

Faith by itself, without works or action, is _____.

James 2:17 NLT

So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

James 2:26 NLT

Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

Faith cannot merely be an _____ belief.

James 2:19 NLT

You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.

Biblical Faith is Active _____.

James 2:23–24 NLT

And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

James 2:25 NLT

Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.

Notes:

Works

Works of the _____.

Galatians 5:19–21 NLT

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Ephesians 2:8–9 NLT

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Works of the _____.

Ephesians 2:10 NLT

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Galatians 5:22–23 NLT

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Notes:

Faith that doesn't act is _____.

James 2:15–16 NLT

Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

Faith that is real cannot remain _____.

James 2:18 NLT

Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

James 2:19 NLT

You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.

Faith that doesn't obey is not _____ faith.

James 2:17 NLT

So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

James 2:20 NLT

How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

James 2:26 NLT

Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

Notes:

Abraham

James 2:21 NLT

Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

Genesis 15:6 NLT

And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Rehab

James 2:25 NLT

Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.

John 15:5 NLT

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

Next Steps

Here are three practice-oriented, Gospel-grounded steps you could offer:

1. Ask: What "good works" has God already put in front of you this week?

(James 2:15–16; Eph. 2:10) → Identify one act of love you can do today to reflect your faith.

2. Do a Faith Checkup

Revisit James 2 and ask: “If someone looked at my life this week, what would they assume I believe?”

3. Abide and Act

Spend 15 minutes in prayer asking God to produce Spirit-driven fruit in your life (Gal. 5:22–23). Then, act on one thing God reveals to you — a conversation, a confession, a service.

Notes:

FAITH

A central theological concept representing the correct relationship to God. Heb. *’mn* and Gk. *pisteúein* demand a variety of renderings besides belief, faith, and trust, especially faithfulness. They may be used for God or human beings. A continuing question involves distinguishing personal faith with which a person believes and “the faith” with an objective content, something to be believed.

Biblical theology usually roots NT faith in the OT, and some speak of a Judeo-Christian concept, even of a “fundamentally identical” OT and NT notion. Actually, Hebrew lacks a word for “faith” (*’ěmûnâ* is rare and equals “fidelity”). This, plus other factors, caused Martin Buber to distinguish two types of faith: OT/Judaic (*’ěmûnâ*), which was tribal, national, communal trust and fidelity, based on the covenant; and Christian (Gk. *pístis*), which was individualistic persuasion or faith, belief in something.

In the OT, along with *’āman*, terms like *bāṭaḥ* (“trust; be confident, secure”), *qāwâ* (“hope”), *yāḥal* and *ḥākâ* (both “wait in hope”) come into consideration. The basic idea of *’āman* is “constancy,” something that is lasting (Isa. 33:16) or someone who is reliable (8:2). More important is the

hiphil *he'ēmîn*, “become steadfast, acquire stability,” used of a person or of God. Applied to human beings, the term often has a negative connotation: “do not believe or rely on ... (a person)” (Jer. 12:6; Mic. 7:5; Job 4:18) or a message (Gen. 45:26; 1 Kgs. 10:7; Isa. 53:1).

Three nouns from *'mn* appear in the OT: (1) *'ēmet*, originally meaning “stability” (Isa. 38:8; NRSV “security”), comes to denote faithfulness or truth (Gk. *alētheia*), on the part of a person (Exod. 18:21; NRSV “trustworthy”) or God (Ps. 31:5 [MT 6]; 146:6) and God’s word (Ps. 119:43; 142; 160). God’s works are faithful (Ps. 111:7), and the promises express faithfulness (Zech. 8:8); on this God, worshippers rely (Ps. 40:11 [12], with *ḥesed*). This reliability makes it possible for mortals to trust in God. (2) The noun *'ēmûnâ* suggests conduct that grows out of a relationship, faithfulness, especially in inner attitude and conduct on the part of an individual (Prov. 14:5; 20:6; 1 Sam. 26:23) or of God (Ps. 89:2, 5, 8, 49 [3, 6, 8, 50]; Deut. 32:4; Isa. 33:6). (3) Heb. *'āmēn* was used in response to God in prayer (Neh. 8:6), or with ritual curses (Deut. 27:15, 16; Neh. 5:13).

Following God’s call to Abram and promise to make him and Sarah a great nation and a blessing (Gen. 12:1–3), the vision and word of the Lord present God’s promise about posterity (15:1–5), followed by a covenant binding God (not Abram) to the promise (vv. 7–21). As a result, Abram acknowledged God’s power to fulfill it.

In Isaiah the prophet will wait for the hidden God and hope in him during crisis times when Israel withheld faith (cf. Isa. 7:9; 30:15).

Some stress Jesus’ call to faith and recognition of it in individuals; others find in Jesus only a Cynic sage, or little that is recoverable. There is some agreement that, according to the Synoptics, Jesus taught faith in God (Mark 11:12 par.) as a basis for “prayer faith” (Mark 11:24 par.) and “mountain-moving faith” (11:23 par.; 1 Cor. 13:2). Unlike the Fourth Gospel, where miracles can produce faith (John 2:11; 4:52–54; 20:30–31), for Jesus in the Synoptics “supplicating faith” leads to miracles (Mark 9:24–27; 2:5, 12 par.; 6:5–6 par.).

A new and specifically Christian use of *pístis* comes in terms of acceptance of the *kérygma* or apostolic proclamation about the crucified and risen Jesus (Gal. 3:2, 5). Gk. *pístis* becomes a technical term for reaction to gospel preaching, an act of faith with regard to the story about Jesus coupled with the promise of future salvation (Acts 4:4, with 3:19–26; 13:48, with vv. 38–39, 46–47; Rom. 10:9–14). This future hope was part of the kerygma (1 Thess. 1:9–10). Christians are “believers” (Acts 2:44; Rom. 1:16; 3:22), “members of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

Paul inherits and exhibits much of this early Christian understanding. The personal faith that comes from hearing the word and confessing Jesus' lordship includes "the obedience of faith" or commitment (Rom. 1:5; cf. 16:26). Hence faith relates to ethics, in close relationship to its expression toward the future as "hope" and toward others as love (1 Thess. 1:3; Rom. 12:1–2, 9–10; 13:8–10).

Paul's contribution involved relating faith to righteousness and justification (cf. Gal. 3:6–14; Rom. 4). He connects faith with "gospel" for salvation (Rom. 1:16), "peace" and "access to God" (5:1–2), the Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 5, 14), "in Christ" (Gal. 3:25–26). "Reconciliation" parallels justification by faith (Rom. 5:9–11), "redemption" (3:24–25). "Fellowship" (*koinōnía*) is connected with God's being faithful (1 Cor. 1:9) and our participation in Christ (Phil. 3:9–10), and "grace" is frequently linked with "faith." For Paul faith becomes the criterion, not "works of the law" such as circumcision and regulations involving clean and unclean, which marked Jews off from others and so precluded a universal mission.

Some Christians may be "weak in faith" (Rom. 14:1), while others can be regarded as "strong" or enabled (15:1). Faith is something that can grow (2 Cor. 10:15) or be lacking in some aspects (1 Thess. 3:10) but then become strong in its conviction (Rom. 4:20–22; 14:5). It is not static in the face of threats but dynamic, showing itself in action (1 Thess. 1:3), through love (Gal. 5:6).

Hebrews has 32 instances of Gk. *pístis*, mostly in ch. 11, about what people in Israel did "by faith." God is the object of faith (6:1; cf. 11:6). Those addressed have come to faith in the gospel message (4:2–3; 6:12). Faith means "full assurance" (10:22), but there is grave danger of those addressed falling away into unbelief (3:12; cf. v. 19). In 11:3–12:2 *pístis* can be trust in God's promise (11:11), accepting what God said (v. 8), or denote what motivated Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (vv. 17–18) or moved Moses (vv. 24–25) or how we understand the world's creation (v. 3; cf. 1:2).

Luke-Acts stress coming to faith as conversion, to "hear the word, believe, and be saved" (Luke 8:12–13; Acts 10:43; 13:19; 16:31; 20:21; 24:24). In miracle stories, faith saves (Luke 7:50; 17:19). "The apostles" can ask "the Lord, 'Increase our faith'" (Luke 17:5). Mary is a model of faith in the beatitude at Luke 1:45. Questions appear as to the existence of faith on the part of the disciples (Luke 8:25; 18:8). Jesus prays that Peter's faith not fail (Luke 22:32). In Acts "the faith" becomes a term for Christianity (Acts 6:7; 13:8; cf. Luke 18:8).

Faith arises out of confrontation with Jesus' word(s) (John 2:22; 4:41, 50; 5:24) as well as his deeds (miracles) and testimony to Jesus (1:7; 4:39;

17:20). Such encounter calls for decision, leading to faith or judgment (John 3:36; 5:24). The Johannine concept of believing also involves “keeping” or “remaining in” Jesus’ word (John 14:23; 15:20; 8:31; 15:4), with a considerable emphasis on “knowing” (17:3, 7, 21; 16:27–30; 6:69; 1 John 4:16). The Fourth Gospel also explores the relation of “seeing” and “believing,” notably in the story of Thomas (John 20:25–29; cf. 4:48).

Bibliography. A. Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (Oxford, 1994); J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, 1997); W. Henn, *One Faith: Biblical and Patristic Contributions Toward Understanding Unity in Faith* (New York, 1995); H.-J. Hermisson and E. Lohse, *Faith* (Nashville, 1981); J. Reumann, *Variety and Unity in New Testament Thought* (Oxford, 1991); W. H. Schmidt, *Faith of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1983); I. G. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*. SNTSMS 84 (Cambridge, 1995).

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WORKS

Acts of God and deeds of humankind in keeping God’s commandments.

Works of God

In the OT the “work(s)” (Heb. *ma‘ākeh*, *mēlākā*) of God are his deeds in creation, salvation, and judgment. The Genesis narrative describes God’s work in creation (Gen. 2:2, 3). Writers occasionally employ anthropomorphic language to describe “the work(s) of his (your) hands” (Job 14:15; 24:19; Ps. 8:6 [MT 7]) and “the work of your fingers” (Ps. 8:3 [4]) with reference to the creation. In other instances (cf. Ps. 145:4, 9–10, 17; Isa. 5:12), writers speak of God’s works in creation and deliverance. Godly people are to “meditate” on God’s good works (Ps. 77:12 [13]; 143:5) and to “remember” them (77:11 [12]).

In the NT the works of God become a major topic in the Gospel of John. In keeping with John’s consistent depiction of the Son as the one who encountered a hostile world that did not “receive” him (John 1:10–11), the writer portrays a world that is divided between those whose “works are evil” (7:7; cf. 3:19) and the One who does the works of the Father (8:41). Jesus

¹ John Reumann, [“Faith,”](#) in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 453–454.

declares, “My Father is still working, and I also am working” (John 5:17; cf. v. 36), and further, “The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me” (10:25; cf. 4:34; 10:32). The Father gave Jesus this work (John 5:36; 17:4), and now the Father dwells in him as he performs these works (14:10). As a result of the work of Jesus, those who believe in him will do even greater works (John 14:12). This view, therefore, is fully integrated within John’s understanding of the believing community as the people who have “beheld his glory” (John 1:14) in the works which the Son performed.

Although Paul employs Gk. *érgon/érge* primarily for human activity, he also refers to the drama of salvation as God’s unfinished work. The Christian brother is the work of God: “Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God” (Rom. 14:20). The spiritual and ethical transformation of the community is the work of God (Phil. 1:6). His demand to “work out your own salvation” is accompanied by the assurance that “it is God who is at work in you” (Phil. 2:13).

Human Works

Acts of obedience to God are commonly described as works. Paul shares the Jewish tradition’s positive evaluation of good works (cf. Neh. 13:14; Matt 5:16; 11:19) in his comments about moral conduct. God will judge each one according to his works (Rom. 2:6, 7; cf. 1 Cor. 3:13, 15; 2 Cor. 11:15). Consequently Paul challenges his readers to abound “in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8; Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 2:17). Indeed, he describes Christian service as “the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58; 16:10) or “the work of faith” (1 Thess. 1:3; cf. 5:13).

Although Paul challenges his communities to be engaged in good works, he speaks negatively of “works of the law” (sometimes abbreviated to “works”; e.g., Rom. 3:27; 4:2, 6; 9:12, 32; 11:6), especially in the polemical situation of Galatians and Romans, where he argues for the admission of Gentiles into community without the entrance requirement for circumcision. To make circumcision an entrance requirement for salvation is to insist on works of the law. The phrase “works of the law,” which is only rarely attested in the Judaism contemporary with Paul, is apparently the equivalent of the “deeds of Torah” that are mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These “deeds of Torah” consist of the fulfillment of the covenantal obligations that are required by the law. Because of the threat of assimilation among Jews who lived among Gentiles in the two centuries immediately prior to Paul, the boundary markers that most clearly distinguished Jews from their neighbors—circumcision, the sabbath, and the purity laws—took on special

significance in Jewish polemics. In Galatians and Romans Paul argues from the experience of his converts (Gal. 3:1–5) and from Scripture (cf. 3:6–29; Rom. 4:1–25) that one is justified, not by works of the law, but by faith (Rom. 3:28; 4:3–4; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5–9). Thus in this polemical context faith is the normal corollary to works. In most instances the object of faith is Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16b, 20; 3:26; cf. Rom. 10:9–10). However, the Greek phrase *pístis Iesoú Christou*, which most translations render as “faith in Jesus Christ,” may refer instead to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ as the corollary to human works. In either case, Paul insists that no one is saved by those boundary markers that he describes as works of the law.

In the Epistle of James faith and works are again set in contrast. James insists that “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:17) and that one’s faith is demonstrated by one’s works (v. 18). In contrast to Paul (Rom. 4:3–5; Gal. 3:6–10), James insists that Abraham was justified by his works (Jas. 2:21–23). James refers to works of mercy, not the “works of the law” described by Paul. He challenges his community to be engaged in the “pure religion” (Jas. 1:27) that consists of adherence to the love command (2:8).

Bibliography. J. D. G. Dunn, “The Theology of Galatians,” in *Pauline Theology*, ed. J. M. Bassler (Minneapolis, 1991) 1:125–46; E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis, 1977).

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OBEDIENCE

The English translation of Heb. *šama*’, referring to the physical act of hearing and, in certain contexts, the combination of hearing with the intent to obey (Exod. 19:5, 8; Deut. 28:1; 30:11–14). If one truly hears the word of God, then obedience is inevitable. Thus, if people fail to obey, the prophets often accuse the Israelites of being deaf (Isa. 6:9–10). Obedience is what is expected of one’s relationship to God (Jer. 3:13, 25) and a son’s relationship to his father (Prov. 4:1–2). Clearly, there is an implied expectation of obedience in “hearing” a message (Gen. 3:17; 23:15; Exod. 24:7).

In the NT there is also the expectation of obedience when hearing a message. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus summarizes his entire message with the parable of the two builders (Matt. 7:21–27). The one who hears the words of the sermon and then translates that hearing into action is like the one who builds his house upon a rock—he is on solid foundation. Not only is obedience the expected response to the ethical injunctions of

² James W. Thompson, “[Works](#),” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1387.

Christ, but it also should be one's response to the gospel (Gal. 3:2). Paul reminds the readers of the Philippian letter that Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the ultimate example of obedience (Phil. 2:8; Gk. *hypékoos*).

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³ Rick W. Byargeon, "[Obedience](#)," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 981.