

Having A Faith That Works

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Growing Into Maturity
James 2:14-26

This morning we're going to continue in a series that I've been doing from the book of James. Those of you who were here will recall that the theme of James' book is about spiritual maturity. He's talking about moving on with God. Not just the initial step of commitment, where somebody crosses the line from unbelief to belief, but making sure that belief matures. James speaks to us about how to move from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood. The section that we're going to look at today has proven one of the most difficult sections for folks to interpret. In fact, the great reformer Martin Luther essentially tossed the whole epistle of James out of the Bible because of the section that we're about to read. People have accused James of not understanding the Gospel because of this section that we'll be studying today. That's quite a claim, that an apostle doesn't understand the Gospel. But we're going to find that when rightly understood and rightly interpreted, this passage is completely consistent with the whole message of the Bible as James deals with the subject of having a faith that works.

As I was thinking about a 'working' faith, I thought about all the things that we have at our home, and you probably have at your homes: all the items that don't work. We probably have three or four-dozen pens at our house that simply don't work. The kind, that when you try to write with them, are so dry that they tear through the paper. You know, they actually make your hand hurt, you pull them along the paper and they're so dry that they start digging into the desk. We have a few pens that so long ago leaked ink into the caps that the cap is welded on to the pen; I don't know why we don't throw them all away. They just contain the promise of writing. I guess we're taken in by the promise.

In the basement we have so many useless appliances. We have electric can-openers with magnets that can't hold the can, so you end up holding it up and rotating it through the motor. We have old crock-pots that won't heat up, 1970's versions of food processors—you remember that advanced equipment: basically all the work was done by your hand. We have radios that only pick up two channels, both of them AM. Flat footballs, torn baseball gloves, broken rakes. You know, if you think about all the stuff that you own that just doesn't work, it's a good illustration of what James is talking about as he describes the uselessness of a faith without works.

Again, my sermon title is *Having a Faith That Works*. Let's pray.

James 2:14-26

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is going without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing for his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

"But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.'"

"Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

“You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

“In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Let me outline this text for you. In terms of structuring the passage, James gives us two negative example of faith without deeds that is two examples of what is not faith. In verses 14-17 he describes the man who wishes his brother well but does not feed him. Then, in verses 18 and 19, he describes the doctrinal assent of the demons. Two negative examples.

And then James goes on and gives two positive examples of what faith is. He talks about father Abraham in verses 20-24, and then Rahab. So, if you’re structuring: what faith is not, and then two examples of what faith is. You could further structure the passage by comparing the first and the last examples. In the first example, we have a man who likely is a religious man, claiming to have faith. And the reason I say likely a religious man is that he claims to have faith, and a brother or sister comes to him. A religious man who claims to have faith. And we can contrast that religious man with the last example of Rahab the prostitute, who certainly was not part of the church, not a religious person—she was a prostitute, a hooker. And yet, the religious man’s faith is just talk, whereas Rahab’s faith resulted in action. The first man walks away being declared unrighteous, whereas Rahab the prostitute, by her action, proves that she has a genuine faith, and so is declared righteous. We can further compare the faith of the demons and Father Abraham, the second and third illustrations. Demons, of course, are the enemies of God, and Abraham here in verse 23 is called a friend of God. The demon’s faith was just doctrinal assent, agreement with certain propositions about God, whereas Abraham’s genuine faith resulted in an obedient response to God.

The first and fourth examples then are contrasted, those are both man-ward activities, that is works toward other people, the second and third example are works toward God. There are a number of ways to structure this text.

But the way that I chose to structure this text is to essentially say that James is trying to teach us about a genuine working faith. He’s talking to people in the church. People, who believe that they are saved, people who think they have a relationship with Jesus Christ that will secure eternal life for them forever. And James is saying: how do you know that your faith is real? That it will produce the effects that you desire, namely salvation. He’s giving us a little spiritual check-up if you will. The Bible calls us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. Now we must be careful about examinations of ourselves. Occasional check-ups are wise, but someone is unhealthy if they insist on taking their pulse every 10 minutes. In the same way, it’s good to occasionally examine the reality of your faith. But some folks so over do it that they end up in morbid introspection. We have to be careful here. Without spiritual check-ups we miss early warning signs of spiritual disease. But too many check-ups are itself a problem.

And so he starts by telling us that a genuine faith is more than words. You see in this first example, James says, “What good is it my brothers if a man claims to have faith but shows no deeds?” He doesn’t say ‘what good is it brothers if a man *has* faith, but has no deeds.’ He says he “claims” to have faith, this man *says* he has faith. But this man is all talk, and we see that he is all talk in verse 15, where a brother or sister is without daily food, somebody who is without the necessities of life, not just, ‘he doesn’t have food in his cupboard,’ but he doesn’t have daily food. The Jews would have referred to the necessities of life by ‘daily’ bread and ‘daily’ food. Jesus told us to pray for daily bread – necessities, not luxuries. He didn’t have enough for today. But this man is all talk though, because his response to this man who can’t meet today’s needs is a religious statement. “Go I wish you well, keep warm and well fed,” but he does nothing.

We live in a culture that is all words. Filled with image, empty claims that believe that so long as we say something that makes it so. More and more our culture is defined by spin-doctors and media hype. “Oh, sure, he murdered his wife, but he was a great actor and she was an alcoholic.” Attempt to redefine reality with words and pictures and images. If you use this mouthwash and smile, men will literally fall off scaffolding when they see you walk by and see your pretty smile. Or if you eat this particular ice cream, you’ll be reconnected with family values—with your ancestors who lived on the farm. Even serving your dog a certain brand of dog food will give him a religious experience—he’ll get up on his hind legs and bark the Hallelujah chorus.

Claims, words, spin doctors cleaning up the mess people make. You know, we have so bought the notion that just by saying certain things, we can create our reality. It’s the way we go about raising children. What is the most important predictor of a child’s success? Pop psychology of the 70’s and 80’s and 90’s have said we must give children healthy self-esteem. I agree, we need to communicate to children positive self-regard. But then the pop-psychology went on and told us how to do it. And it is not by giving children experiences in which they are forced to persevere through adversity that they can feel good about themselves having really accomplished something, having endured. That positive self-regard would be the fruit of proven character, of real accomplishment, of effort and battling through temptation or refusing to quit. That kids would feel good with a job well done; no we don’t say any of those things. We say that the way to get positive self-regard is just to say good things to children and teach them to say nice things to themselves. And so we hand out empty prizes and recognition and awards that are based on no accomplishment whatsoever. I read about one school district that used to give pizza parties for students that had perfect attendance for the year. And then they decided that it was too high a standard and that it was going to damage other children’s self-esteem, so they began to give pizza parties for perfect attendance for three weeks of school. In still another district, high school students were encouraged to make posters celebrating what they were proudest about in regard to themselves. They had things like ‘Jennifer Smith is the proud owner of a 1990 Toyota, and just got her nose pierced.’ That’s the kind of stuff that will build a solid foundation for healthy self-esteem.

But the craziest things were that all the words produced exactly the opposite effect of what the experts told us they would produce. Have you ever heard the theory that violent criminals suffer from low self-esteem and low self-regard? And the reason that they do these violent things is that they feel terrible about themselves. So we need to keep speaking words to them—about how valuable they are and how important they

are. Set up self-esteem groups in prison. Have you ever heard that theory that violent criminals suffer universally from low self-esteem and self-regard? It's completely false. Recent major studies of violent criminals show that they actually have an inflated sense of self. A view of self that goes beyond bounds, and the reason they become violent is because they don't believe that they ever ought to be crossed. They feel so good about themselves, and so expansive regarding their rights and their just desserts, that anyone who tries to put limits on them gets beaten or shot.

Or how about this one, that children's' academic performance is directly tied to their self-esteem. That we need to keep putting stars on papers and speaking words of encouragement, and that will cause them to perform better. One psychologist, a guy by the name of William Colson, who helped found the movement to emphasize self-esteem as a part of school curriculum, now travels around the country saying 'I take responsibility, I was a part of this approach that has taken over the educational system, but we were wrong. He now encourages teachers to stand up for a return to academics. Why the turn-about? Because as part of his research, there recently was an exhaustive review of different classroom techniques. The project known as Project Follow-through, to track 7,000 children at 139 schools across the country. And they discovered that the educational model that centered on self-esteem resulted in lower academic scores than any other models evaluated. And on the other hand, instructional methods that produced the best student performance stressed effective teaching of academics, and made no attempt to enhance good feelings, except by rewarding good work.

Words. Do you know that American students rate themselves the highest in math performance, while the Japanese generally rate themselves below average? And yet Americans, on a trans-national basis, actually score the lowest, below Slovenia—and Japanese score the highest. The bottom line is that you cannot tell anything by mere words.

Now it would be marvelous if it were just the larger culture that deceived itself by empty talking and false claims. The problem is, is that the church has been infected with the illusion that if we can just talk the talk, we have genuine faith. And I'm not simply describing the super-spiritual person who mouths highest phrases, you know that dripping, insipid religious talk that comes out of some people who have been trained to use religious words—believing that it makes them spiritual people. I'm not just talking about them. I'm referring to the notion that most folks in the church have; that because we talk about something, we actually accomplish something.

Tonight we're going to talk about evangelism. And we're going to discuss various methods of evangelism, and we're going to compare and contrast. Programmatic evangelism with Proclamation evangelism, and Personal evangelism and Power evangelism and Presence evangelism. We're going to analyze the merits and demerits of all the different methods, and discuss people's motivations to evangelize, obstacles that keep us from sharing our faith. We'll further discuss objections to faith. It is not bad, we do training classes here, but friends, going to an evangelism training class are not evangelism. Discussing methods of sharing your faith doesn't mean that you actually do share your faith. I see this confusion, particularly in churches that could be described as classroom churches, where there are tons of lectures, and everyone has notebooks, and they have this exclusively intellectual approach, and that is the culture in the church.

I see people coming from classroom churches continually fall into this trap. They become so adept at reading and handling concepts, they think that because they

can manipulate the concepts and express the theology of something, they can do it. “I know all about healing, I read a book on it.” They’ve never actually ever seen one person healed through their prayers. “I could describe to you all about spiritual warfare”, but in looking at the twenty years of their Christian life, they’ve never actually cast out one real demon. They’ve talked about it and have read all of the theory, but there’s never been much spiritual power. “Let’s talk about the poor. We’ll have a study group on the poor and social concerns. We don’t really know any poor people; if we did know them we wouldn’t really like them; we’d lock our doors...” By talking about it we feel like we’ve actually engaged.

James says genuine faith is more than empty claims, more than words. That’s why; by the way, very few of our small groups are pure Bible studies here in the Vineyard. In virtually all of our small groups, we require the group members to do certain things. To actually worship God, to wait upon God for His voice. To share spiritual gifts, and then to actually lay hands on each other to heal the sick and minister to the hurt and so on.

Let me get personal here. Where are you at on the ‘talking—action’ continuum? Would you say that there’s a large disparity between what you know and talk about and what you actually do and can do? What you’ve actually seen? Do you know infinitely more about evangelism than what you actually practice? When is the last time somebody made a decision for Christ through you? When was the last time you actually did something for a poor person? When was the last time you actually saw someone get healed?

Now, let’s look back at the text and understand what James is saying. He asks two rhetorical questions, and you know a rhetorical question is a question that has an obvious answer. He asks two rhetorical questions in verse 14. “What good is it my brothers, and I will add sisters, if a man claims to have faith and has no deeds?” The obvious answer is ‘no good.’ “Can such a faith save him?” The obvious answer is ‘no.’ He goes on and says “suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, if one of you says to him go, and be warm and well fed, but *does* nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by deeds is dead.” In other words, a non-working faith is a useless faith.

James is telling us that a so-called faith, which gives nothing, costs nothing, does nothing, will, in the end, produce nothing—in terms of salvation. It costs nothing! It’s no sweat to say a couple of nice words. Some nice kind hopes, wishful thoughts or fond sentiments. What kind of action is James commending to us? He’s commending costly actions. Something that actually requires us to reach in our pockets and give something.

Let me reframe this so that we understand what’s being said. People that go to Heaven are people who love God, not those who talk but those who love. “So where is that, Rich?” Well, we saw that in James 1:12, “*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.*” James said the same thing in James 2:5, “*Listen my dear brothers, has not God chose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised to those who love Him?*” People who go to Heaven are people who love God.

How do we know if we love God? Well, we know that we spend on what we love. What we love shows up in our day-timer and in our checkbook. If you love sports, you spend lots of time playing sports and watching sports. If you love clothing, you

spend lots of time looking at clothes and buying clothes. We don't love what we don't spend on. My stepfather is a jeweler and is making a fortune now, literally. A fortune sewing cigar holders for golfers. People who play golf often like to smoke cigars; he's a jeweler, and he's made silver cigar holders that you can place in the ground like a tee to hold your cigar while you putt. People spend on what they love. I love to read, so I spend time reading and money on books. Genuine faith costs something, because genuine faith is one that claims to love God.

So let me get personal again with you. How much does your faith cost you? How much does your Christian faith cost, in terms of money? Does your Christian faith cost you one percent of your income, does it cost five percent or twenty percent of your income? How much does your faith cost you in terms of money? We spend on what we love. Some of us give waiters and waitresses higher tips—we give them fifteen percent of what they give us. We give waiters higher tips than we give God. We don't give Him fifteen percent of what He gives us.

How much does your faith cost in terms of time? Sometimes it's easy to write a check. But time, actually taking two hours to serve God by bringing a meal to someone's house or mowing his or her grass. You know, cost is also measured by a willingness to risk for God. Genuine faith takes risks for God. Look at Rahab in verse 25, "in the same way was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction." Now, Rahab's faith was a genuine faith because it cost her something. It wasn't just talk. If you're not paying for your faith, you've got to ask yourself whether it's real. She gave lodging. But she not only gave lodging, which involved time and money, but she opened herself up to great risk. She was harboring the enemy. She allowed Israelites into her home, and offered them shelter when the Israelites were the enemies of Rahab's own people. She could have been killed for her action of mercy. She had a risky faith.

John Wimber, who's the president of the Association of Vineyard Churches, the founder of our movement, has said for years that he spells faith r-i-s-k. It's risk. What are you willing to risk for God? That's a way to measure the genuineness of your faith. Are you willing to step out and make a move into a new ministry or move to another place, because God is telling you to do it? Even if you can't see exactly how it will work out. Do you require that you be able to add it all up and make sure all the money's in the bank and all your ducks are in a line? Or do you sometimes risk for God? God is telling you to reach out to a neighbor. To invite a classmate to group or church. To persevere in reconciling a difficult relationship. To give a word in a small group or pick up your hands in worship just because you love God. Bottom line is, a faith, which does not cost you anything, is not worth anything. Let me say that again. A faith that does not cost you anything is not worth anything. And ultimately, it will not result in salvation.

"Show me faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God—good. Even the demons believe that and shudder. You foolish man" You want evidence, but faith without deeds is useless. He's saying that genuine faith is more than doctrinal assent. Faith is more than words, or doctrinal correctness. Now, James is not saying that doctrinal correctness is unimportant. We must have correct doctrine to assure ourselves that when we're dialing the number of Christ we're not dialing some other person. When we're opening ourselves up to God, we want to be sure we're not opening ourselves up to another spirit. Correct doctrine means that when I am involved in spiritual things, I'm going to be involved in those things that are true and safe and are associated with a good God. You see, we

Christians don't follow the rest of the culture in their celebration of all things spiritual. If you look down the best-seller list now of the top selling non-fiction books, many of them have spiritual themes, laws of spiritual wellness. We are becoming a very spiritual nation. But being spiritual doesn't mean that you are being involved with the true God. Correct doctrine, correct theology, guides your spiritual theology to those spiritual beings that are healthy and true, those spirits that will help you and not hurt you. Just as you would not ingest any chemical believing that it will relieve your headache, so you ought not open yourself up to any spiritual experience believing that it will help you spiritually. Before you pop a pill in your mouth, I hope you read the bottle or take the counsel of a doctor, and before you open yourself up to a spirit, or to an experience, or to an environment, be sure that it is doctrinally correct, that is, it's Biblical. Something that Jesus, the great physician, would recommend. You want to make sure you're dialing up God and not some demon.

But genuine faith is more than doctrinal correctness or assent. You see, the demons are actually quite accurate in much of their doctrine. Have you ever noticed, just as a side note, that demons in the Bible, often give a fuller and more correct explanation of Jesus than the apostles do? While the apostles are fumbling around and bumping into each other, and arguing about who's the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, the demons are screaming out, "I know who you are! You're Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy one of God." In Mark 5:7, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" Or in Acts 16:17, the fortuneteller is following Paul around saying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Demons can speak accurately in terms of their doctrine. They may be quite orthodox, in a sense. The problem is their refusal to respond to the truth, is it not? They don't respond. They shudder, James says. They shudder at the thought of the power of God. They shudder when the name Jesus Christ is named, rather than rest in confidence, or turn that they might be saved. So you can be quite orthodox, and like the demons, not respond, and so end up in Hell. Do you understand James' point?

You can have a demonic type of faith, in which you're doctrinally correct, and you can define things, and agree with the notion that Jesus Christ died for your sins, but you make no response—no lifestyle change, no repentance—then you could end up where the demons will go. Or to use another example: have you ever noticed that Jesus almost never corrects the Pharisees on points of doctrine? The Pharisees were actually quite accurate in much of their doctrine. They had an accurate understanding in many respects, in things like the resurrection of the dead, and the nature of God, and the requirements of sacrifice, and so on. Jesus generally doesn't get into doctrinal arguments with Pharisees, except, of course, in terms of their understanding of who He was. The issue was their lack of response to the truth that they had.

I want to underline this for you. Many people quote from John 8:32, "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" They think knowing more will bring freedom. If they have more insight, more information, more doctrine, then their lives will be better and their addictions will be broken. But they need to read verse 31 that says, "*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*"

In other words, it's not the doctrine you know, but the doctrine you hold to and respond to that saves you. It's not the truth you know, it's the truth that you respond to that sets you free. How many messages have some of us heard? How much Christian teaching have we received, how many tapes, how many sermons, how many books,

how much information? How free are you? How liberated from sin? How much conformed to Christ? How full of peace? How joyful? It's not the truth we know about or assent to; it's the truth we respond to.

James says that the demons believed 'that there is one God.' Genuine faith goes beyond 'believing that' certain things are true. Genuine faith believes *in* the truth. You see, I can believe that Christ rose from the dead, and that He died for our sins, but that is not the faith that saves. The faith that saves is belief in a person. Not belief about a teaching, but a belief in a teacher. The faith that saves is "trust in Jesus." Trust that all authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Him and that He has the power to save you.

There are things that you must believe to be saved, but genuine faith goes beyond, and it requires a belief in the person of Jesus Christ. Genuine faith is more than mental assent, it requires commitment. So many single men would assent the proposition that marriage is a good thing. But they are unwilling to make a commitment, therefore they remain unmarried.

You've heard the classic story about the difference between mental assent and commitment regarding genuine faith. As the story goes, a man strung a high wire over Niagara Falls. He asked the audience, "How many of you believe that I can walk across this wire over the Falls, and do it safely?" Everyone cheered, "Yes, we believe!" He got up on the wire, walked across he then said to the crowd, "How many of you believe I can walk across the wire pushing a wheelbarrow?" They cheered again, "Yes, we believe!" Climbed up with a wheelbarrow, pushed it back and forth. Everybody applauded, he said, "How many of you believe I could walk across the Falls with a man in the wheelbarrow?" Again, everybody cheered, "We believe!" He said, "Which one of you wants to volunteer to get in the wheelbarrow?"

You see, you do not have genuine faith until you get in the wheelbarrow, and personally place your life in the hands of God. The way Martin Luther said it, "Genuine faith goes beyond believing what is said of God is true. Genuine faith means throwing yourself on to the person of God."

We might go on and say that genuine faith goes beyond an act of the mind, or even an agreement with the mind. Genuine faith means trust from the heart. I'm afraid that so many people have an intellectual faith, and they believe it is a saving faith, when it is not. God is looking for people to do more than check a box next to certain doctrinal propositions. It's not just having a new comprehension; it's being a new creation. I have often said that being a Christian is not a matter of answering a true/false test. Christ rose from the dead: true; Christ is God's son: true. Instead it is a yes/no test. Will you give your life to God? Yes. Will you surrender to God? Yes. Over against true/false answers, God is looking for entire surrender. When you come to the place where you're at the end of your rope, and you say yes to God and no to yourself, "God I surrender to you, and to your purposes in my life. I give up, I yield, You take control." This is something that happens in the heart, which according to the Bible is the core of your being, you agree to stop running the show. You invite God instead to take control.

One theologian said, "True faith is when the Holy Spirit illumines the mind, warms the heart, and liberates the will so that we believe and obey." Do you respond to the truth? Is there a truth that God has been trying to speak to you that have you have not been responding to? Regarding your speech pattern? Regarding your sexuality? Regarding a call on you? Regarding a relationship?

Last of all, I said that genuine faith is more than lonely. James goes on and says, *"You foolish man, do want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac at the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness', and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."*

Now, it is this particular section that many, many theologians struggled over for centuries, to the point where they said, "James the apostle is obviously contradicting Paul's teaching, because Paul says faith alone justifies, completely apart from the works of the law." For example, in Romans 3:28, *"We maintain that a man is justified by faith, apart from observing the law."* Or Romans 4:6, *"David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works."*

And now here James says that a "person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." Many folks have said, look at that, we have a contradiction in the Bible. Paul says faith alone saves, and James says no it doesn't, it's faith and works. Martin Luther, who was a 'faith alone' person, a man who recovered the Gospel of 'faith alone,' was so upset when he read the book of James that he wanted to remove it from the cannon of scripture. It's no Gospel, no good news. With all deference to the great Martin Luther, I believe he is going to have a lot of apologizing to do to the apostle James for his slanderous statements regarding this wonderful letter.

You say, Rich, how do you fit James and Paul together? One says faith alone saves. The other says you need faith and works. Friends, many of you know that before I pastored I was a lawyer, and my professional training is in law. Now for those of you who never attended law school, you may not realize, but one of the things that you're required to do for three years in law school, from day one, is to spot the issue. From a mass of facts that are presented to you in a case, you get trained, through practice, to spot what the issue is. What question is being asked in this particular case? Because until you understand the question that is being asked, the issue that's being raised, you won't understand why the judge reached the conclusion that he or she did.

Let me apply this to this so-called contradiction between Paul and James. There's no contradiction at all. Paul was dealing with a different issue than James. And because they were dealing with different issues, they reached different conclusions, and used the terms in different ways.

What was the issue that Paul was addressing? In the book of Romans, the issue that Paul was addressing was: how can sinful people ever gain acquittal and stand in righteousness before God? By deserving it, or by receiving that right standing through faith. How can we ever, as sinful people, get a not guilty verdict on our life, Paul was asking. By meriting it through works? Or by receiving a not guilty verdict as a gift through faith. Paul's answer is 'not works, but receiving your salvation through faith alone.' Faith alone justifies.

The issue for James is totally different. James' issue is 'How do you know that your faith is genuine?' How do you know your faith is real? James would never disagree with the proposition that salvation is a gift to be received by faith alone. The only question for James is, 'How do you know that you've got a *real* faith?' And so Paul and James use their words differently. When Paul speaks of being justified by faith, he is talking about God declaring you righteous—slamming the gavel down and declaring

‘not guilty, you are righteous in my sight, I declare it!’ It’s a judicial verdict. When James says that you’re justified by works, he is not talking about God’s declaration on your life or a judicial pronouncement. James is saying that your works evidence the genuineness of your faith.

Paul is talking to the person who says, ‘How can I be saved?’ And he says faith alone, Christ alone, that’s what saves you. James is not talking to the man who asks, “How can I be saved?” He’s talking to the man or woman who asserts he is saved, “I do have faith.” And to such a person, James says, prove it. Demonstrate it, evidence it! To the man who says, ‘How can I be saved?’ we say have faith in Christ. To the man who says, “I am saved,” we say prove it; show it by your works. See, to the man or woman who asserts, “I am saved.” James is asking – would there be enough evidence to convict you of having a genuine faith if you went on trial for your faith? You know the old line – if the communists took over and arrested Christians, who were really a threat, would there be enough evidence to convict you? If your faith is real, it will issue forth in works. Your works testify to the genuineness of your faith. They’re exhibit ‘A,’ ‘B,’ ‘C,’... If you want to be convicted of having a saving faith, show your works.

See for James, a genuine faith is never a lonely faith. It never stands alone. Look at what he says about Father Abraham. Verse 22, “You see that his faith and his actions were working together.” Faith works together with works. Genuine faith does. Faith alone saves, but faith never remains alone. It never hangs out by itself. It always drags behind a friend called works. Not in order to merit salvation. But because it is impossible to have faith without having an action produced by that faith. It’s impossible to have faith without having a response. You know, the President’s wife’s name is Hillary Rodham-Clinton, she goes by a hyphenated name. Genuine faith is always hyphenated. It’s always faith-works. Faith, hyphen, works.

I’m afraid that Christians always try to separate what cannot be separated. We talk about coming to Jesus as Savior without turning to Jesus as Lord. The reality to turning to Christ as Savior is evidenced by whether you come under Him as Lord. People think they can be justified, declared right by God without being *made* right. That you could be declared holy without becoming holy. The Bible never cuts that cord. No one who is not becoming holy has ever been declared holy. No one who doesn’t more and more bring their life under Jesus’ authority has ever met Him, or really trusted in Him as savior. And no one who is not involved in good works—we’ll talk about what those are—but no one who remains un-involved in good works has genuine faith. Abraham’s faith worked together with works. And Abraham’s faith was made complete by his works. Verse 22, “and his faith was made complete by what he did.” That means it was brought to maturity, it was furnished out. Faith contains the potential, but the actual is the works. Faith is the seed, but the tree is the works. Faith is the root, but the fruit is the good works. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 2, we are not saved by works, but we are saved for works.

Abraham’s faith was completed, literally brought to maturity, and isn’t that what James’ whole letter is about? Being brought to maturity that you might be whole and complete? Abraham was matured and made complete by obedience to what he believed.

The last thing is that faith is proven by works. This is where James said that you see that a person is ‘justified by what he does, and not by faith alone’. Here James is using the word justified to mean vindicated, evidenced. Jesus says the same kind of thing in Matthew 12 where he says that a tree is known by its fruit. If you look at an

apple tree, you know that the seed from which that tree grew was an apple seed, and not a peach pit. You know it was not a grape seed, or a watermelon seed. How do you know when you put something into your heart, that what is being planted in the heart is the miracle of genuine faith, given to you by the Holy Spirit? How do you know? Because it's evidenced, James says, by what you do.

Friends, what kinds of deeds evidence genuine faith? How do you know if God, through the Holy Spirit, has worked the miracle of faith in your life? What would you look for in terms of the deeds? May I suggest a few? In Abraham's action of sacrificing his son Isaac, I think of Devotional Deeds. Deeds of surrender to God. What you ought to be seeing in your life are actions in which you are placing things that are idols, or things that you love, you are placing them on the altar to God. Because you love God more than you love these things. Because God is worthy of them, Devotional Deeds include prayer, worship, and sacrifice.

Mercy deeds, that's the second thing. Rahab gave shelter and food, care to the Israelites who needed her protection. James, in James 1:27 says, *"religion that God our father accepts is pure and faultless as this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress. You ought to be seeing mercy deeds, where you are meeting people's needs, issuing from genuine faith."*

You ought to be seeing moral deeds. Where more and more you're putting off habits of immorality. And adopting habits of holiness. Again, in James 1:27, he says, *'religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.'* We ought to see moral deeds.

I think we ought to be seeing relational deeds. A commitment to God's people in the Church.

Last of all, I think of mission's deeds. If you are truly in love with God, there's genuine faith in your heart, you will want to tell someone else about Jesus. You won't be able to keep it to yourself. If you really believe that you have the cure for what ails men and women—if you really believe you've got the cure—then you're not going to keep it to yourself, you're going to be compelled to tell someone. Is your faith genuine, James asks us? Then it is going to work. And it's going to issue forth in good works.

Let's pray.

Having A Faith That Works

Rich Nathan
October 5-6, 1996
Growing Into Maturity
James 2:14-26

- I. **Genuine faith is more than words (verses 14-17)**
 - A. A culture impressed by words
 - B. A church impressed by words
 - C. A faith illustrated by costly action (verse 25, 26)
- II. **Genuine faith is more than doctrinal assent (verse 18, 19)**
 - A. Believing that, and believing in
 - B. Assent and commitment
 - C. Act of the mind and trust of the heart
- III. **Genuine faith is more than lonely (verses 20-24)**
 - A. Paul and James
 - B. Father Abraham
 - 1. Faith works together with works
 - 2. Faith is made complete by works
 - 3. Faith is proven by works