

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Dead Faith, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-8

For our time in the Word of God tonight, I want to draw your attention to the second chapter of James. So, open your Bible, if you will. In the time remaining, I want us to look at James chapter 2, verses 14 through verse 26, the end of the chapter.

We introduced this a couple of weeks ago to you but we want to really dig in to the text as we look at it again tonight. A couple of key verses to take note of in this section, James 2. The first is verse 17. There James writes, "Even so, faith if it hath not works is dead being alone." Then verse 20, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead." Then verse 26 basically says the same thing, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." The theme of this very important passage then is "dead faith."

And as I suggested to you last time, the distinguishing mark of dead faith is the absence of righteous deeds. It reflects a person who believes in the facts of God's truth but feels no particular compulsion to behave in a righteous manner and produces no works of true goodness. And this is of great concern to James. In fact, it's of great concern to God and therefore a great concern to us.

James, really, throughout his entire epistle is concerned to deal with the reality of living faith as opposed to dead faith. And like John, in 1 John, he gives some tests of a living faith. Let's go back to chapter 1 for a moment and we'll note in verse 12, "Blessed is the man that endures temptation; for when he is tested or tempted he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love Him." And here we find that one of the tests of living faith is a person's endurance in trials, reaction to trials. Down in verse 19 we read, "Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath for the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." Another test is a person's reaction to circumstances.

How does a person react to trials? That will tell you about whether their faith is living or dead. How does a person react to circumstances? Do they react with wrath and anger? That works not the righteousness of God.

And thirdly, what about their reaction to the Word of God? That's another test of true living faith. Notice verse 21, "Putting away filthiness and over-flowing of wickedness and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your lives, be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves." Another true test of living faith is obedience to the Word, reaction to the

Word. Is there obedience? And therein lies the distinguishing mark of living faith.

In verse 26, he says further that if a person doesn't bridle his tongue he has a meaningless religion. There's another test of living faith, the control of the tongue.

We come down to verse 27, another test of living faith, pure religion and undefiled before God is to visit the orphans and the widows in their affliction. So another mark of living faith is a concern for the needy. How a person reacts to trials, how they react to circumstances, how they react to the Word, how they control their tongue, how they demonstrate concern to the needy is a combination of things which mark out living faith.

Then in verse 27, at the end, "To keep oneself unspotted from the world." A person's relationship to the world is a mark that will distinguish them in regard to what kind of faith they have. In fact, later on in this very same epistle, chapter 4, James says if you're a friend of the world, frankly you're an enemy of God. So he's very concerned with tests of a living faith.

Another one is in chapter 2 verse 9, "If you have respect of persons, you commit sin and are convicted of the law as transgressors." That is another test of living faith is your partiality or impartiality...not playing favorites.

Another test of living faith is in chapter 3 verse 13 down through verse 18. It talks about wisdom that is from above. You can look at a person and determine by their behavior whether they evidence a demonic kind of attitude or a godly kind of wisdom. Chapter 4 verse 6 talks about humility. God resists the proud, gives grace to the humble. Verse 10 says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of God and He will lift you up." Another distinguishing trait of living faith is humility.

And so, we see then that James is giving us all through his epistle and there are others, tests of a living faith. And in the midst of it, in chapter 2, he points out the character of a dead faith. That is a faith that says all the right things and affirms to believe all the right things but manifests no transformed life.

Now as I mentioned, also, last time, James wrote to Jews-- that's indicated in chapter 1, verse 1. He wrote to Jews who had come out of a traditional legalistic Judaism. And the stress there was on works, works, works, works and that's how you become right with God. You do certain religious deeds, certain righteous works and you are made right with God. That works system was a stifling burdensome system that could not accomplish what it promised to accomplish. And so people were tired of legalism. They were tired of a works-righteousness system and when the gospel of grace was preached, many of them ran to the freedoms of the gospel in hopes that it would be a deliverance from the unsatisfying work-system they had known for so long. And when they came to freedom in Christ, and liberty in Christ, and the grace of God in Christ, they perhaps went too far

under the mistaken notion that now all they needed to do was believe, they showed some indifference toward any works at all. No works were necessary. Works weren't efficacious so we won't give any thought to that at all. It's simply a matter of believing.

But that was not right either. They had gone all the way from legalism to antinomianism and neither of those is correct. In fact, early pagans used to accuse the Jews of joining Christianity because it was cheaper than Judaism. You weren't required to pay a certain amount. There was no legalism at that point. And the new message of Christianity about grace and faith and freedom looked like great relief to them and they rushed into it with a very intellectual kind of assent and no change in their life. And this same phenomena can be seen today. As I pointed out last time, people run out of a legalistic background and they usually abuse it by going overboard in their new found freedom.

And so, we understand the context then. Behind the scenes we have people who are at last free from a legalistic works/righteousness system and are only interested in the liberation and not in the reality of righteousness. I remember as a boy singing a song very often in church, "Only Believe, Only Believe." And you perhaps remember that song as well. Well, it isn't quite that simple. A better song is "Trust and Obey." There is a consequence to true belief. It isn't just only believe.

But there were many people to whom James writes in this sojourning Jewish community whose faith was a dead faith. They would not pass the tests of a living faith. Their reaction to trials was not a godly reaction. Their reaction to circumstances was not a holy reaction. Their response to the Word of God was not a proper response. Their treatment of poor people, orphans, widows, their connections with the world betrayed that they indeed had not been transformed. They perhaps showed respect of persons. They demonstrated a demonic worldly wisdom rather than a wisdom from God. In fact, if we go into chapter 5, they may be being described there as those who are deep into riches, who will howl when they face the judgment of God. But, intellectually they believed the right facts. They assented to the facts of the gospel but there was no transformation. And you must understand that a person can believe the facts of the gospel and never embrace the lordship of Jesus Christ and never know the transforming power of God.

Let's look, then, at the character of dead faith, and then the comparison, the character of living faith in these verses. Three things mark out non-saving dead faith, three things. Number one, empty confession...empty confession, verse 14; "What does it profit, or what good is it, or of what benefit, what gain, my brethren," speaking of his Jewish brethren and of those who were brethren at least in the visible church on the outside, "What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith and does not have works? Can that kind of faith--parenthesis-- save him?"

Now this person claims to have faith in God, claims to be a believer, claims to be in right relationship to God. Perhaps even affirms believing in Jesus Christ. Back in chapter 2, verse 1, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory with respect of persons?" In other words,

don't have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that manifests itself this way. So we could assume that the faith here in verse 14 is a faith that would embrace Christ. They believed that Jesus was God, the Messiah. Perhaps they believed, of course, that He died and rose again. All of those facts were in the right perspective. But what good is it, what profit is it, of what use is it to make a claim that you believe that, to say you have faith if you have nothing to evidence it?

For the sake of argument, James says a man comes along and makes the claim. He confesses to believe the truth of salvation, present tense. He is constantly saying he has faith. He keeps on making that claim and maybe he even identifies outwardly with the visible church. But what good is such a continual habitual claim to faith if he doesn't have works? And here the works referred to are good works, righteous deeds. If these are not the evidence in his life then where is the salvation.

The point being, you cannot have a true salvation without evidence. You cannot have a genuine conversion without a product. I mean, there has to be a transformation. If before my redemption I live for the flesh and against God and if redemption is transformation then at least has to be a reversal of that so that I now long to live for God and to do those things which His power is working in me. So what good is such faith? The answer is no good. It's no good at all. It's nothing but an empty confession. It's nothing but a meaningless profession. It is like Matthew 7, "Lord, Lord, we did this and we did that..." And He says, "Depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity."

In other words, the point is this, I don't know you. I hear what you're confession but I see when I look at your life that you are workers of what? Of iniquity. Your claim is meaningless. Of what value is a claim to believe when all the evidence is unrighteousness? The point being that where there is the work of God there will be the evidence. And that is why in looking at false teachers in that same seventh chapter, he says "By their fruit you shall...what?...you shall know them." That's the evidence. It's the product.

I mean, it's so simple, people. Listen, it's this simple. You can not know that anyone possesses saving faith any other way than by their works. There's no other way to know it. It's the only way. And a claim with no evidence substantiates nothing.

Now, what works might we expect to see? Well, let's go back and go over that little list we looked at a minute ago. Go back to verse 12 of chapter 1. One of the evidences of living faith would be a man who endures trials, a man who has patient endurance, a man who has triumphant endurance, a man who shows consistency in trials, consistency under pressure. It's not the patience here, hupomoneis not the patience that sort of passively endures, but it's the spirit of victory. It's the spirit of triumph. It's the spirit of hope. And nothing shows living faith better than endurance in difficulty.

Remind yourself of Matthew 13 in the rocky soil. The seed went in, plant jumped up and then everything looked good. But when tribulation and distress came, the plant was scorched and it died.

Nothing will reveal genuine faith better than a trial. It shows whether a person has triumphant faith, triumphant endurance. Go down to verse 18. "Of His own will begot He us with the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures, wherefore since we are new creations, my beloved brethren, that will be evidenced by our response to circumstances, being swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath, because those things don't work the righteousness of God."

A changed life, a life marked by a readiness and an eagerness to listen to the Word of God and a slowness to speak one's own opinion. And verse 21 reflects the context being that of listening to the Word rather than reacting with self-opinion and self-authority. Verse 21 talks about purity, putting away filthiness and wickedness. Talks about meekness. These are all evidences of living faith. Verse 22 to 25 talks about attentiveness and obedience to the Word, being not just a hearer but a doer of the Word. That's another evidence. That's another fruit, obedience to the Word of God. Not like the man who looks down, takes a passing glance and looks away and forgets what he saw, but the one who has living faith looks long into the Word of God and does all he can to implement it in his life.

Verse 26 again, the person who has living faith demonstrates control of his tongue, not all the time but some of the time. In fact, John Calvin suggested that such a person is continually pointing out the defects of others in a lustful attempt to make himself look good. In other words, that's the person who thinks himself to be religious, verse 26. The person who thinks himself to be religious is always pointing at everybody else's defects. But the person who is truly religious, who has a true faith, a living faith is one who bridles his tongue, one who controls his tongue.

To look at it in a contrastive way, if you are a true believer and you have living faith, it's evidenced by your works. If you have a dead faith, you're usually busy condemning the works of other people, or condemning even the sin of other people because you have nothing to show for yourself so you play the hypocrite by condemning others.

In verse 27, again one of the marks of a living faith as we saw will be compassion. That's a mark of the work of God in the heart. That's the Lord at work. Another thing is to be unspotted from the world. And then chapter 2 verses 1 to 9 where the faith is a living faith, there will be a love and there will be not the respect of persons that marks most people, but an equality of love that treats everyone the same. And then in chapter 3 there will be wisdom from above that is pure and peaceable and gentle, verse 17, and full of mercy and good fruits and with partiality, without hypocrisy and fruits of righteousness will be sown in peace by them that make peace. Chapter 3 again, verses 6 to 10, talk about humility, as we saw. So, all of these things will be the evidences of living faith, some of the good works that James identifies.

So what good is it...going back now to chapter 2...what good is it to make an empty confession about your belief if there's nothing to prove it? This is not an uncommon thing, beloved. This goes on all

the time. Recently I had occasion to pray with a person and to hear them affirm faith in Jesus Christ and make a commitment to Christ with no change.

In fact, I had an interesting incident happen to me the other night. I was having a discussion while we were walking along the freeway, I was with a fellow pastor and he took me out to dinner with our wives and the wives took the car and went in that car because they didn't know where to go...his wife didn't know where to go and I rode with him and he had not enough gas to get where we were going. So, about 9 o'clock on Friday night we ran out of gas, just about where the Ventura Freeway unloads into I-5, right at the turnoff there, the ramp going down toward 5 going to Los Angeles. The car just stopped. And the cars, of course, are going by like you can't believe. And he said, "What do we do now?" I said, "Walk and carefully."

So, we got out and we began to walk and the only consolation for our half-hour trek across the freeway was I found a lot of golf balls that had been hit out of Griffith Park and stacked my pockets full, being the Scotsman that I am. But as we were walking along, we were having a profound discussion about the matter of saving faith. And he said, "Don't you believe it's enough?" And I remember it so visibly because I was walking across...we had to walk on the freeway, jump over a couple of streets where off ramps were, go across the freeway on one of those ramps and the bridge is only a very narrow place to walk and then a very low railing and all these cars are going under me and he's asking me profound questions and I'm just trying to get there without falling off. But we had this very meaningful discussion about the...and he said, "Isn't it enough to believe in Christ, isn't that enough?" And I said, "You tell me if it's enough for a person to pray the prayer and invite Christ into his life and then you watch the life and there is no change. Now tell me that's enough. Tell me that the work of God is done but there's no change. No."

Well, he couldn't say that. And that's the point. That's what James is saying. He's not asking for perfection here. He's just asking for some fruit, some good work. I mean, every branch that bears not fruit, He what? John 15, He cuts it down and burns it. And in 1 John 1, John keeps saying, "If we say...if we say...if we say..." and the implication of all of that is if that's all there is, so what? If we say...it's the if-we sayers versus the if-we doers. If we say...if we say...if we say. But if we do then we give evidence of belonging to God.

James adds at the end of verse 14, "Can faith save him?" What's the answer? Not that kind of faith. Faith not accompanied by moral character, faith not accompanied by righteous conduct, can that be saving faith? James answers no. Can such an empty confession save from a God who is merciless to the man who shows no mercy? Go back to verse 13. I don't know how people can miss the implication of that verse. "God will have judgment without mercy on the one who has shown no mercy." What it's saying is God will judge a person who's not shown mercy. Well, wait a minute, is the standard of salvation showing mercy? No, but that's the evidence of it. And if a person hasn't shown mercy, then it's evident the work of God is not wrought in his heart and therefore he will be

shown no mercy because he will be judged as an unbeliever. God judges us on the basis of our works because where true salvation exists, works are manifest.

Go back to Romans 2. In Romans chapter 2, verse 1, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." It says you're condemning other people for things you're doing yourself. And then he goes on to talk about the judgment of God. And he says in verse 6, and here's the basic bottom line in judgment, "God...the end of verse 5 mentions God, and then it says..."who (verse 6) will render to every man according to his faith." Is that what it says? What does it say? "According to his deeds." You say, "Are we going to be judged on our works?" That's right. "To people who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honor and immortality, He'll give eternal life."

You say, "Wait a minute. You mean eternal life comes to those who do good deeds and seek for glory and honor and immortality?" That's right. "Well, I thought salvation was by grace." It is, it's only the grace of God and the soul of man that can produce those works. But if those works aren't there then the grace isn't a work. The transformation hasn't occurred. On the other hand, those that are contentious, do not obey the truth, obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath is going to come.

And so, verse 9, "Tribulation, anguish upon every soul of man that does evil." Verse 10, "Glory, honor, peace to every man that works good, and to Jew first, and also to the Greek." In other words, we'll be judged on our works. Why do you think God is keeping the books? Revelation 20 says that everybody in the great white throne day is going to be judged out of the books, the record of our deeds, because our deeds are what manifest whether or not there's a transformed life. That's the point.

So, can a faith with not product save? Of course not. Go back even further in your New Testament to the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, Matthew 25, and you'll find again the same teaching is there. This is not some new teaching in James. "When the Son of Man comes (Matthew 25:31) in His glory, all the holy angels with Him, He'll sit on the throne of His glory; before Him shall be gathered all the nations, He'll separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. He'll set the sheep on the right hand, the goats on the left." Here's the judgment. "Separating the righteous from the unrighteous. And He separates them and says to the ones on His right, You're going to inherit the Kingdom." And why? Why you going to inherit the Kingdom? "Well, I was hungry and you gave Me food. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink. I was a stranger, you took Me in. I was naked and you clothed Me. I was sick and you visited Me. I was in prison and you came to Me."

Wait a minute. You mean you're saved by philanthropy? You're saved by being merciful to people, giving food away and drink and lodging strangers and giving clothes and visiting sick people and prisoners? You mean that's what saves you?

No, "Then shall the righteous say, Lord, when did we ever do that? When did we ever do that? When did we ever see you hungry and feed You or thirsty and give You drink and so forth?" And He says in verse 40, "Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, My brethren, you've done it to Me."

Now wait a minute. He literally says you're going into My Kingdom on the basis of your what? Your works. You say, "Well, doesn't that contradict Scripture?" No. It doesn't contradict Scripture. You can talk about salvation by faith but you can't talk about salvation by faith without works. And so the works are always the evidence in judgment because they're the only criteria there is. There isn't any other. And if they aren't there, the faith isn't legitimate. We're not in conflict with Paul's teaching at all in Romans. Paul and James are simply coming at the issue of salvation from different viewpoints. Paul is emphasizing in Romans that salvation is by grace through faith. Apart from works, he says in Ephesians 2:8 and 9. Yes, you're not saved by works, you are saved, Ephesians 2:10, "Unto good works." Very basic. Paul and James completely agree that God gives grace and then out of that grace comes the fruit of that grace, righteous works, righteous deeds.

Jesus said, "If you continue in My Word then you're my real disciple," John 8:31 and following. So, the manifestation of true salvation is in the product. James is considering here then empty confession with no evidence, an intellectual external acceptance of Christianity but not wholehearted commitment to Christ. And that's the issue.

So, dead faith initially then is marked by empty confession, empty confession. Compare that, for example, with Acts 19 where that great revival in Acts 19 in Ephesus when the people believed the gospel immediately what did they do? They brought all their magical books and all of their paraphernalia and they did what? They burned it all. There was an initial response with a changed heart. And what about the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1? He says, "I'm so glad that you turned from idols to serve the living and true God." There was a transformation, there was a turning in your affections. That's basic. Any doctrine of grace which eliminates the fruit of grace strikes a blow right at the heart of grace for it is transforming grace, not just forensic grace. It is not just a declaration of salvation without a transformation, it is a real transforming grace. No one is saved by works, but no one is saved without producing works.

James is very similar to 1 John. Look at 1 John for a moment, chapter 2, very very similar because John is compelled also to deal with marks that distinguish living faith. Verse 3 of 1 John 2, "By this we know that we know Him if we keep His commandments," that's fruit. "He that says I know Him and does not keep His commandments is a liar," I mean, that's pretty straightforward stuff. "The truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His Word," that is obeys the Scripture, "in him verily is the love of God perfected and by this we know we are in Him."

You see, John is giving the tests of living faith here, also. It's not like in chapter 1, as we mentioned, if we say this and if we say this and if we say this, it's if we do His Word, if we love His law. It further says, verse 9, "He that says he's in the light and hates his brother, he's in darkness no matter what he says," the fruit isn't there. "He that hates his brother," verse 11, "is in the darkness, walks in darkness, doesn't know where he goes because darkness has blinded his eyes." And so he says it doesn't really matter what you say, what matters is the fruit of your life.

Verse 15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is...what?...not in him." Again, you're looking at fruit...you're looking at fruit. And in verse 19 he says, "There were some people who went out from us but they never were of us because if they'd been of us they would have stayed with us. But they went out from us that it might be made manifest they were not of us." They left because they weren't interested in the climate of fruit bearing.

So, empty confession then is nothing but dead faith. And this calls for self-examination. Is yours a confession that evidences its reality? Or is it an empty confession? Look at the second thing. The first is empty confession, the second characteristic of a dead faith is false compassion...false compassion. James wants to deal with this, so he's selective in his three distinguishing marks, the second one is false compassion.

Verse 15, "If a brother or sister is naked and is without daily food." Now here's a person in dire circumstances. They don't even have clothing. They're naked and that probably doesn't mean stark naked but they're without the proper clothing. And they do not have...not only not having luxuries or fancy food, they don't even have daily food. They're starving without clothes. "And one of you says, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled." It's like saying, "I wish you well, hope you make it, fella." "Nevertheless you don't give him the things needful to the body, what does that profit?"

If you see an ill-clad brother or sister, absolutely deprived of the necessities of life, starving to death, brother or sister, and all you have for that brother or sister are a bunch of empty platitudes about, "Well, I hope you make it," "Be warmed, be filled," "I wish you well," then how does that kind of faith profit that doesn't reach out to the fatherless and the orphan and the widow and the stranger and doesn't show love? And John says the same thing exactly in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 17, the parallel is obvious, "Whoever has this world's goods, sees his brother have need, closes up his compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, we don't love in word, neither in tongue, we love in deed and in truth." It's the same thing...just empty words, pious indifference.

There was a strain of Greek religion, by the way, in which this sort of attitude was prevalent. There was a Greek word, still is, apathea(?), we get the word "apathy" from it. It basically is a word meaning the complete absence of all feeling, the complete absence of all emotion. And the Stoics

believed that was the highest virtue. So you tried to be unemotional about anything and totally unfeeling so you could maintain your own serenity. So, your serenity was your supreme quest and you did all you could to make sure you never felt grief and you never felt pity and you never felt anything that upset your own serenity.

But that's a far cry from a Christian attitude. If we can look at someone with that kind of indifference, we have to ask ourselves the question that James is posing and John posed: is our faith saving faith or is it dead faith? What good is that kind of faith? It's no good at all. It's dead...empty confession, false compassion. And so, in verse 17 he says even so faith--that kind of faith--if it doesn't have any works is dead because it's alone, it produces nothing because it can't produce anything, it has no life.

It may have been their idea that now we believe and we'll leave everything to God. We have no responsibility for anything, we feel no duty, we sense no obligation. Dead faith, empty confession, false compassion, thirdly, James identifies dead faith as having shallow conviction...shallow conviction.

Follow his thought in verse 18, "Yes, a man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works. Show me thy faith without thy works and I'll show thee my faith by my works." Now let me tell you what this verse is saying, it's a marvelous verse.

The man here is James. But he's too humble to use himself and so he speaks in the third person because he doesn't want to be thought to be boasting about his works. So let's say James for the words "a man." "Yes, I James may say to an antagonist, to somebody defending a faith without works, I may say you have your faith, do you? Well, I have my works. I'll tell you what, you show me your faith without any works. Go ahead, show it to me." How can he? How can you do...can you see faith? Can you say, "Well, open your mouth wide and say, Ah?" How am I going to see your faith? Am I going to give you a brain scan? How about an EKG? Is it going to show up there? Where am I going to see your faith? And James is asking a paralyzing question to the person who wants to support the idea that you have a faith with no fruit. He's saying, "All right, show it to me." And he says, on the other hand, "I'll show you my faith by my works. I can do that, you can't do what you say." I have works, that's the mark of living faith...the acid test. Go ahead, show me your faith. It's impossible. Can't do it. How's he going to show it? I'll show you my faith by my works...the only way. That is the only way possible.

So, here is a very, very simple test. The one who claims to have faith needs to show it. And if there's no evidence of a transformed life, there's no faith.

Look at verse 19, let's follow the little debate he's having with his imaginary antagonist. So he says to him, "You believe there's one God. You are a monotheist? You do well." That's very sarcastic, folks. Aren't you something? A little applause, please. You believe there's one God, do you? Oh, you're

doing so well.

And, of course, that was the shimma(?), I mean, that was the heart and soul of all of the theology of Israel. The Lord our God is one, the Lord is one, Deuteronomy 6: 4 and 5, and so forth. The basic theological doctrine of Scripture is the unity of God. And the Jews prided themselves on their orthodoxy. And so he's saying you believe there's one God, you stand in the great Judeo Christian heritage, you believe that? That, by the way, you believe "that" there is one God is houti(?), it's an intellectual rather than the preposition en(?) or ais(?) which would be "you believe in," or "you believe into," which would be relational. This is just intellectual. You believe the fact about God. You have the right belief. I say this is a shallow conviction, this is a superficial belief. "Believe" in a true sense is a commitment. In fact, we don't have time to really develop it but back in John 3, that very beloved sixteenth verse, God tells us the gospel in brief terms, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth..." That same word "believe" in 3:16 is translated in chapter 2 verse 24, "But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them." And the word "believe" can as well be translated "commit" because it implies that commitment. It is not just an acknowledgment of facts, it is a commitment to a person.

So, here you have those who believed that there was one God, not necessarily believing in that one God, and certainly not committing to that. Like many people in the Roman Catholic Church today and in other forms of quote/unquote "Christian" tradition, they hold an orthodox theology. They're representative of people that you could say today, "Do you believe that Jesus is God? You do well, you do very well."

How well do you do? "The devils also believe and they go one better than you, they shake. You, my friend, are inferior to demons in your understanding." You see the sarcasm of "you do well, oh, you do well?" You're just one notch below demons. At least they shake. They're orthodox. You know that? They're orthodox. All demons are orthodox, there are no neo-orthodox demons. There are no liberal demons. There are no rationalistic demons. There are no heretical demons. They all believe the truth because they know it's true. They are orthodox and they tremble. The word "tremble" literally is the word "to bristle" from hair standing on end. They know what the godless are going to get and when they believe in God, they believe that God is and they know who God is and they shake because they know God is the judge. They go one better than those with dead faith. Dead faith is inferior, may I say it, dead faith is inferior to demon faith because at least the demons shudder. They don't produce good works either, by the way.

But that's far from saving faith, far from faith which produces righteousness. It's far, far from the faith of the Beatitudes--the poverty of spirit, the meekness, the brokenness over sin, the hunger and thirst after righteousness--far, far from that.

Thomas Manton(?) that great Puritan who has written so many marvelous, marvelous things demonstrating insight into Scripture, describes non-saving faith this way: "A simple and naked assent to such things as are propounded in the Word of God and maketh men more knowing but not better, not more holy or heavenly. They that have it may believe the promises, the doctrines, the precepts as well as the histories. But yet, living saving faith it is not, for he who hath that findeth his heart engaged to Christ and doth so believe the promises of the gospel concerning pardon of sins and life eternal that he seeketh after them as his happiness and doth so believe the mysteries of our redemption by Christ as that all his hope and peace and confidence is drawn from thence. And doth so believe the threatenings, whether of temporal plagues or eternal damnation, as that in comparison of them, all the frightful things of the world are as nothing."

Manton further adds another aspect of non-saving faith. He says, "It is distinguished from temporary faith which is an assent to Scriptural or gospel truth accompanied with a slight and insufficient touch upon the heart called a taste of the heavenly gift and of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come in Hebrews 6:4 to 6. By this kind of faith, the mind is not only enlightened, but the heart is affected with some joy and the life in some measure reformed, at least from grosser sins called escaping the pollutions of the world in 2 Peter 2:20. But the impression is not deep enough, nor is the joy and delight rooted enough to encounter all temptations to the contrary. Therefore, this sense of religion may be choked or worn off, either by the cares of this world or voluptuous living or great and bitter persecutions and troubles for righteousness sake. It is a common deceit. Many are persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the only Son of God. And so are moved to embrace His person. And in some measure to obey His precepts and depend on His promises and fear His threatenings. And so by consequence, to have their hearts loosened from the world in part and they seem to prefer Christ and their duty to Him above worldly things as long as no temptations do assault their resolutions or sensual objects stand not up in any considerable strength to entice them. But at length, when they find His laws so strict and spiritual and contrary either to the bent of their affections or worldly interests, they fall off and lose all their taste and relish of the hopes of the gospel and so declare plainly that they were not rooted or grounded in the faith and hope thereof," end quote.

This is nothing new. In the 1600's, men like Thomas Manton recognize the same reality. And so, James says, "You believe there's one God, you're orthodox? Isn't that nice. Dead faith is only one notch below demon faith."

Verse 20, "Will you know, O vain man," and again, the imaginary antagonist, "Will you know that faith without works is dead, will you know, O vain," that's a word for empty-headed, "will you know, O empty-headed man," used often of imposters, "will you know, you imposter, that unproductive barren fruitless faith is dead?" Faith without works is dead. Faith without works is barren.

He uses two different words for dead. Earlier he used the word nekra(?) which means dead, here he uses a word argewich which means fruitless. Fruitless faith is a useless faith. Faith without works is

fruitless, produces nothing. So, you have a verbal confession, no meaning to it at all, empty confession, empty, shallow conviction and a hypocritical compassion.

In closing, and just briefly, from verse 21 to 26, he shows living faith. We need not say much about it because it's so very apparent. But notice in continuing his little argument with his imaginary objector, he turns the corner and describes living faith. And he says this, first of all I want to give you number one illustration--he gives three illustrations of living faith. Number one, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?" He's speaking to a Jewish audience so he calls him Abraham, our father. Was he not justified by works. And you say, "Whoa. Paul says he was justified by faith. And Genesis says that Abraham believed God-- chapter 4--and it was counted--pardon me, Romans chapter 4-- Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness." That's a quote from back in Genesis. Genesis 15:6, that it was Abraham's faith. "What are you saying it was his works?"

Well, see, James is just coming at it from another angle. Was Abraham justified without works? No. The demonstration of his faith in God came when he had offered up Isaac his son on the altar. Genesis 15:6 said, "Abraham believed God, it was counted to him for righteousness." That's quoted in Romans 4 again. Now listen. He was saved by faith. By the time you come over to chapter 22, seven chapters later in Genesis, it's about 30 to 50 years later, and it said in chapter 15 that he believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. But the truest proof of that is recorded in chapter 22, "For there his salvation raises a monument of legitimacy as he willingly offers his son Isaac on the altar." His beloved son, the one in whom all his hope resided. And that is what James is saying. Was Abraham not justified by works when he offered up Isaac on the altar, was that not a work that spoke of a real faith in God that would pay any price? Was that not a righteous deed?

Verse 22, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works and by works was faith fulfilled?" The Scripture was fulfilled in Genesis 15:6 when Abraham did what he did in Genesis 22. Scripture was fulfilled. His declaration of Abraham's faith, God's declaration of Abraham's faith in Genesis 15 is verified in Genesis 22. So Abraham, as to the legitimacy of his faith, was proven by the willingness to offer Isaac. He was then justified by faith. That act...he was, I should say, then justified by works which were the verification of his faith.

The second illustration, we're hurrying a little, Rahab and it's in...let's finish up Abraham first. I don't want to get ahead of myself. Verse 23, "The Scripture was fulfilled which said," and he quotes Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God, it was counted to him for righteousness, he was called the friend of God. You see then that by works a man is justified and not by faith only." So, you take Genesis 15:6 and you have salvation by faith in the case of Abraham. You take Genesis 22 and the works are the verification of that. And that's the sum of his testimony to Abraham.

Then in verse 25, quickly, in like manner you have Rahab. Rahab was a harlot. You can't get any further from Abraham than a harlot. She was a Jew...he was a Jew, she was a Gentile. He was a righteous man, she was a harlot. He was a man, she was a woman. The contrasts are obvious.

So, this harlot Rahab was justified by works. Yes, she believed in the true God. Yes she understood enough about the true God to believe in Him, to trust Him. But the evidence of her faith was when she received the spies and had sent them out by a way of escape to be delivered from those who would have taken their life. She believed God and the evidence of that belief was in her life. In Hebrews 11:31, it says this about Rahab. "Rahab, the harlot Rahab, by faith perished not with them that believed not when she had received the spies with peace." The act of receiving the spies, protecting them and getting them out without losing their lives, was the way her faith demonstrated its reality. She first believed...go back and read Joshua 2:1 to 11, she believed. It says there she believed. She acted on that belief, the good works--Joshua 2:12 to 22--prove her faith.

So, James is saying there's no such thing as a living faith without works. Finally, the third illustration is an analogy, verse 26, "As the body without the spirit is dead." Is that not so? What have you got when you have a body with no spirit? Death. "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead, also." Living faith, beloved, must manifest itself in righteous deeds. And so he contrasts dead faith and living faith.

And you need to study this even more deeply for yourselves because I've hurried through that last portion. But let me draw you to a concluding point in the end of the book of James, the last two verses. "Brethren, if any one of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins."

You know what I believe James is saying here? There are a lot of people who believe on the surface, but they really err in misunderstanding dead faith to be living faith. And if you convert them to the reality of a living faith, you will save a soul from what? From death. Believe to the saving of your soul and bring others to that same true faith. That's what James is saying. And what an important and essential word that is for all of us. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we have just covered this so briefly and there's so much here. But confirm to our hearts Your Word. We rejoice in the privilege of knowing You with a living faith. O how grateful we are and for those who have even this week come to the Kingdom with a true and living faith. We would pray also, Lord, for those who may have nothing more than a dead faith. O Lord, bring them to a true and living faith, a faith that works, a faith that produces righteousness, therefore giving evidence of the power of the grace and the transforming strength of the work of the Spirit in the human soul. We thank You for the living faith that we enjoy. We bless Your name, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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