

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, April 7, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

## WALKING THE TIGHTROPE BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS “Finding the Balance Between Faith and Works” *James 2:14-26, Selected Scriptures*

**OPENING EXERCISE:** We claim to believe in salvation by grace alone plus nothing else, but is that really the message others are getting? Do we believe in a “works-oriented” salvation? Does anything we say or do promote or suggest that we espouse a “works-oriented” salvation? Listen as the following case studies are read and see if you can discern what is going on in each case in both the individual’s life and what they are hearing and what is perhaps being communicated by the one’s they are hearing it from:

**CASE STUDY 1:** I’ve started going to church recently and I really am enjoying it. It’s very regimented and organized, and I like that. I’m the kind of person that likes order and knowing what’s expected of me. I can see what it means to be a Christian. I’m thinking I’m going to give this Christian and church thing a try. It seems to me from all I have seen and observed, that all you have to do is show up regularly at church, read your Bible, pray, give to support the church and you’re in. There are also lots of places to get involved and get to know people and make friends. The talks (the call them sermons) are good and uplifting. I guess that’s all there is to it, so I’m all in! Sign-me up!

**CASE STUDY 2:** As I sat listening to the visiting Evangelists preach I suddenly became very concerned about whether I was truly saved or not. He kept speaking of walking down the aisle, and taking the pastor’s hand and praying this “sinners” prayer, and that if you have never done that you’re not saved. All of a sudden I began to question everything I had experienced and if I had done it “right.” I’ve been a Christian for several years now, but it didn’t happen that way for me. A friend told me about Jesus, and I wanted what she had. She said that all I had to do was ask Him and He would save me and make me His. I did that and was later baptized and became a member of my church. Everything I read in the Bible says that we are saved by God’s free and undeserved grace, but I was hearing this preacher that everyone seemed to respect say that if I didn’t walk the aisle, hold the pastor’s hand and pray this certain prayer that I wasn’t really saved. Maybe I missed something? Was I really saved?

**CASE STUDY 3:** I am a very “religious” person. I grew up in the church, and was a Christian from the cradle roll. I’m one of those who is at church “every time the doors are open.” My parents before me were Christians, and their parent before them. You might say I’ve been a Christian all my life. I inherited it from my parents. I read my Bible

regular, and pray to God daily. I am also very benevolent when it comes to the church and helping others. I think others would say about my life, "He is one of the most religious people I know!" and would say I'm a really good man. So when others ask if I am a Christian, I can say "Absolutely!" with confidence. I've been one all my life and my life speaks for itself.

- (1) *What positive "one word" would you give to characterizes statement? i.e. "good," "religious," "churchman," "confident," "respected," "self-assured"*
- (2) *What negative "one word" would you give to characterize this statement? i.e. "pride/proud," "arrogant," "deceived," "presumptuous," "pretentious," "ostentatious," "superficial," "showy," "hollow," "conceited," "overconfident," "audacious,"*
- (3) *What is missing from this statement? Any mention of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a personal salvation experience*
- (4) *Do you think this person might be confused about how to become a Christian and what it means to be a Christian? Explain.*
- (5) *What does this statement say about the tension and confusion between "faith/grace" and "works"?*

The blazing brand of the Reformation was "justification by faith!" Martin Luther was the passionate blacksmith who forged the Reformation with his hammer of conviction on the anvil of the book of Romans. Since his day, evangelical Christians have borne that brand and stood upon the principle that salvation is a faith-plus-nothing-else transaction. Especially helpful in healing that historic fire is such passages as:

**Ephesians 2:8-9** – *"<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not of works, lest anyone should boast."*

**2 Timothy 1:8-9** – *"<sup>8</sup>Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, <sup>9</sup>who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began."*

**Titus 3:1-7** - *"<sup>1</sup>Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup>to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. <sup>3</sup>For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, <sup>5</sup>not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

But the passage under consideration in this study seems to suggest a contradiction. We want to discover exactly what this passage from James says and how it fits into the theme of justification

by faith alone. In reality, these thirteen verses capsule the major message of James' letter... all the verses preceding and following this passage act as arrows pointing to it.

## ➡ **READ: James 2:14-26**

### **INITIAL CLARIFICATION: What about the faith-works issue?**

At the heart of James 2:14-26 is the simple fact that genuine faith produces genuine works. If this is not the case, then the validity of the faith should be questioned.

**What this is not saying?:** *What we are not saying when we say that if one's faith does not produce works that validate it, it is not genuine (real)... that person is not saved? What we are not saying?*

1. **We are not saying that it is our place to decide (determine) if someone is saved or not** – It is not our job to look at the life of another person and judgmentally pronounce that person saved or lost. God and God alone can see what is truly in one's heart... not us. Salvation is God's work. He does the saving, and He alone knows if one is indeed saved.
2. **We are not saying that "good works" cannot be deceiving** – Just because someone does good things, and may perform acts of kindness, and be kind hearted does not necessarily mean that are Christian and have come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Many good men and good women who are not professing Christians do noble things, benevolent things, and things that are worth of praise.
3. **We are not saying that the genuinely saved can't backslide** – Genuinely saved believers can be unkind at times, can be selfish, prideful, lustful, greedy, non-benevolent, etc. Sometimes Christians, those genuinely saved, are living in a backslidden condition and the works of their life may look like that of a lost person. We should pray and seek to restore such a one.
4. **We are not saying that works save us** – It is clear from the abundance of Scripture that we are not saved by our works (i.e. Ephesian 2:8-9, 2 Timothy 1:8-9, Titus 3:1-7). We know from God's Word that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our works, by what we do. We are saved by what Jesus did. In saying that "works" may validate one's faith we are not saying that those in any way actually produced salvation in that individual.

James began this portion of his letter with two questions asked back to back:

### **2 Questions James Asks of the Faith/Works Issue:**

1. **What use is it if a man says he has faith, but he has no works?**
2. **Can that faith that is devoid of faith save him?**

Many have missed the thrust of James' message, thinking it contradicts Paul's message of justification by faith alone as addressed in the book of Romans (and his other letters/writing). The following chart may be helpful in clear up any confusion.

	PAUL'S MESSAGE	JAMES' MESSAGE
<b>Emphasis</b>	Calls attention to the "root," looking at what happens at the moment of salvation	Calls attention to the "fruit," looking at what happens after salvation
<b>Perspective</b>	Focuses on God's part	Focuses on man's part
<b>Terms</b>	Deals with "justification"	Deals with "validation"

**Amplification:** In Romans, Paul announced and ratified the thesis that the lost man is declared righteous by God's grace apart from works... that man is freely justified by faith and not by works of righteousness. In contrast, James announced that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. He said that there are things which should come to pass in the life of a believer, indicating that he or she is indeed a saved person. When Paul spoke of justification, he spoke of the act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner while he is in a sinning state. On the other hand, when James spoke of justification (in reference to Abraham... see 2:21), he referred to the demonstration whereby a man's works validate him as a genuine believer.

#### **IN-DEPTH CONSIDERATION: What kind of faith saves? (James 2:14-25)**

James' second question probes a bit deeper than his first, in which he basically asked, *"What good does it do if a man says he has faith but has nothing to validate that faith?"*

- A. **The Question (James 2:14)** – "Can that faith save him?" The question is , in other words, "Can that phony, empty, fruitless faith save?" The clearly implied answer is "NO."
- B. **The Characteristics of Genuine Faith (James 2:15-20)** – In these verses James outlines four marks of authentic Christian faith.

#### **4 Characteristics of Genuine Faith:**

1. **It is not indifferent, but involved (vv.15-16)** – *"<sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"* As James put it, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food... and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" He proposed a situation that featured fellow Christians in need of life's necessities. He said that such expressions as "go in peace, be warmed and be filled" have not meaning in the context of need. Words of this kind are telltale signs of empty, powerless faith. On the other hand, genuine faith produces works of

compassion and involvement. People of genuine faith become personally involved in meeting genuine needs.

**Biblical Example: Luke 10:30-37**

- (1) *Who in this story would you have expected to see “real faith” coming from?*
- (2) *What gave evidence of “real faith”?*

**KEY TAKE AWAY: Real faith get’s involved**

2. **It is not independent, but in partnership (v.17)** – *“<sup>17</sup> Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”* James wrote, “Thus also faith, by itself, if it does not have works is dead.” The most important part of his statement are the two little words *“by itself.”* Genuine faith does not exist alone: there must a marriage between faith and love. Works validate faith and say that it is alive.

**Biblical Example: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

- (1) *In the “Love Chapter” what partnership do you see between faith and especially love? You can’t have one without the others (see vs. 1-3)*
- (2) *What here gives evidence of “real faith”?*

**KEY TAKE AWAY: Real faith will always be partnered with what authenticates it (i.e. love, mercy, grace extended)**

3. **It is not invisible, but on display (v.18)** – *“<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”* Real faith is not hidden. James said it this way, *“... someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” The word “show” means “to bring to light, to display, to exhibit.”* In concise terms, if faith doesn’t show works, it’s not faith; the real thing is displayed and evidenced in a Spirit-empowered fashion.

**Biblical Example: Matthew 5:13-16**

- (1) *How do the examples mentioned in Matthew 5:13-16 (salt and light) support the idea that our faith should be shown or displayed? Cite examples of how each displays faith.*
- (2) *What is the purpose of a displayed faith? For self? For others?”*

**KEY TAKE AWAY: Real faith will be shown outwardly**

4. **It is not merely intellectual, but from the heart (vv.19-20)** – *“<sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! <sup>20</sup> But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”* As he did in the preceding point, James used an imaginary character through which to speak this point: “You believe God is one... the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize... that faith without works is useless?” Using extreme sarcasm, he calls attention to the sophisticated individual who would say, “I am a religious

intellectual who loves the exercise of thinking, but I am not interested in involvement.” Then James compared such intellectual faith to that which demons have which causes them to shudder (“to be rough, uneven; to have gooseflesh”). The term “demon” has its roots in the Greek word for “intelligence.” James said that even the demons believe in the unity of the Godhead. Their theology is impeccable. They know much more than any earthly religious intellectual will ever know. But even though they know the facts... to the extent that the facts evoke fear in them... their belief adds up to nothing.

**Biblical Example: Luke 18:18ff**

- (1) Are there any indications in this story that the “rich young ruler’s” faith was merely intellectual and not from the heart? If so what? Explain!*
- (2) Does Jesus’s encounter with the young man support the point that genuine faith is more than just intellectual knowledge of God and the things of God? How? Explain!*
- (3) Why, do you think, did the religious young man go away sad?*

**KEY TAKE AWAY:** Genuine faith is more than just a head knowledge it is a heart change.

**CONCLUDING PRINCIPLE: Wherever you find separation, you find death! (James 2:26)**

After citing two examples of individuals whose faith was validated by their works (Abraham – the father of the Jews, a respected man; Rahab – a Gentile harlot, a woman “insignificant” to the people), he drove home his point with this succinct statement: “... Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.”

**Principle to Remember:** Spiritually, when demonstration of faith separates from faith, that faith becomes lifeless and useless.

James says in his concluding verse of chapter 2, in James 2:26, “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.*” *If this is a true statement, and I believe 100% that God’s Word is always true, why is it true... how do we know it is true... what evidence is there that it is true?*

*John 15:1-11, “<sup>1</sup>I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup>By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. <sup>9</sup>As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just*

*as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."*

### **Biblical Truth to Support the Guiding Principle of James 2:26:**

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE:** *Spiritually, when demonstration of faith separates from faith, that faith become lifeless and useless.*

1. **Genuine faith and spiritual life is always and only through Jesus Christ** - Jesus said in John 14:6 *"<sup>6</sup>...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* Jesus clearly says He is the "only" way to the Father and in Him and Him alone is the way, the truth and the life. John 15 speaks of this relationship with Jesus as an "abiding" one and that if we abide in Him we will bear much fruit in John 15:5, *"<sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."* You see, genuine faith that saves and spiritual life is only found in Jesus and a personal relationship with Him.
2. **Genuine faith and spiritual life is always authenticated through the fruit of our life** – Of course the passage we just read in John 15:1-11... Jesus own words, clearly state this truth. John 15:4-5 says, *"<sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."* But this truth is abundantly clear elsewhere in Scripture. Jesus said in Matthew 7:20, *"... by their fruit you will know them."* And the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, even tells us what that fruit coming from the life of genuine faith ought to look at in Galatians 5:22-23, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."*
3. **Genuine faith and spiritual life is always meant to glorify God** – Jesus tells us in John 15:8 says, *"<sup>8</sup> By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."* Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:10, that *"... we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."* God saved us by faith in order that we may do "good works" or "bear fruit" to His glory. This may also be a good measure of our "fruit" or "works" as believers... a good fruit inspection gauge for us; Who is getting the glory, me or God? This may be a genuine measure of genuine faith. Genuine faith produces fruit that glorifies God and points other to Him.

What is true of physical life is also true of spiritual life: physically, when the soul leaves the body there is separation... death. Spiritually, when demonstration of faith (fruit) separates from faith, that faith become lifeless and useless.